New SuperSix • Racing in Rwanda • Vincenzo Nibali • Korea by bike • Cervélo S5 tested

Australia/NZ

Cyclist

The World's Biggest Road Cycling Magazine

The High Country's hidden gem

Quiet roads, climbs and water views – this ride around Lake Hume has it all

Train smarter

Why interval training gives maximum bang for your training buck

Are wider tyres faster?

Find out what the experts think

ISSUE 63 ❂ JULY 2023 ❂ AU $12.95 NZ $15 (INC GST)

63

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VISIT…

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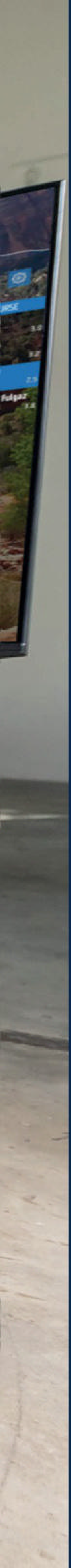

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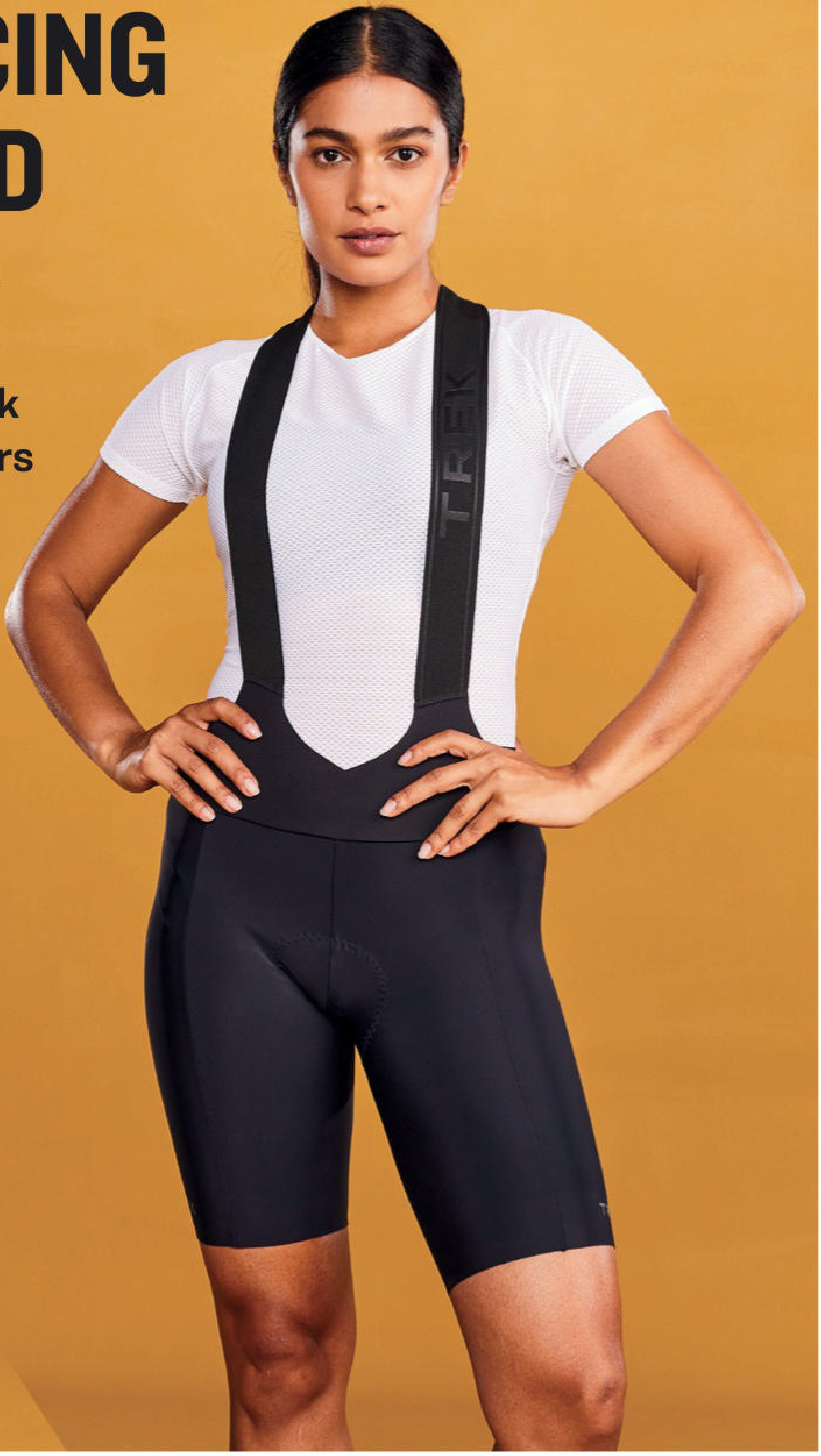

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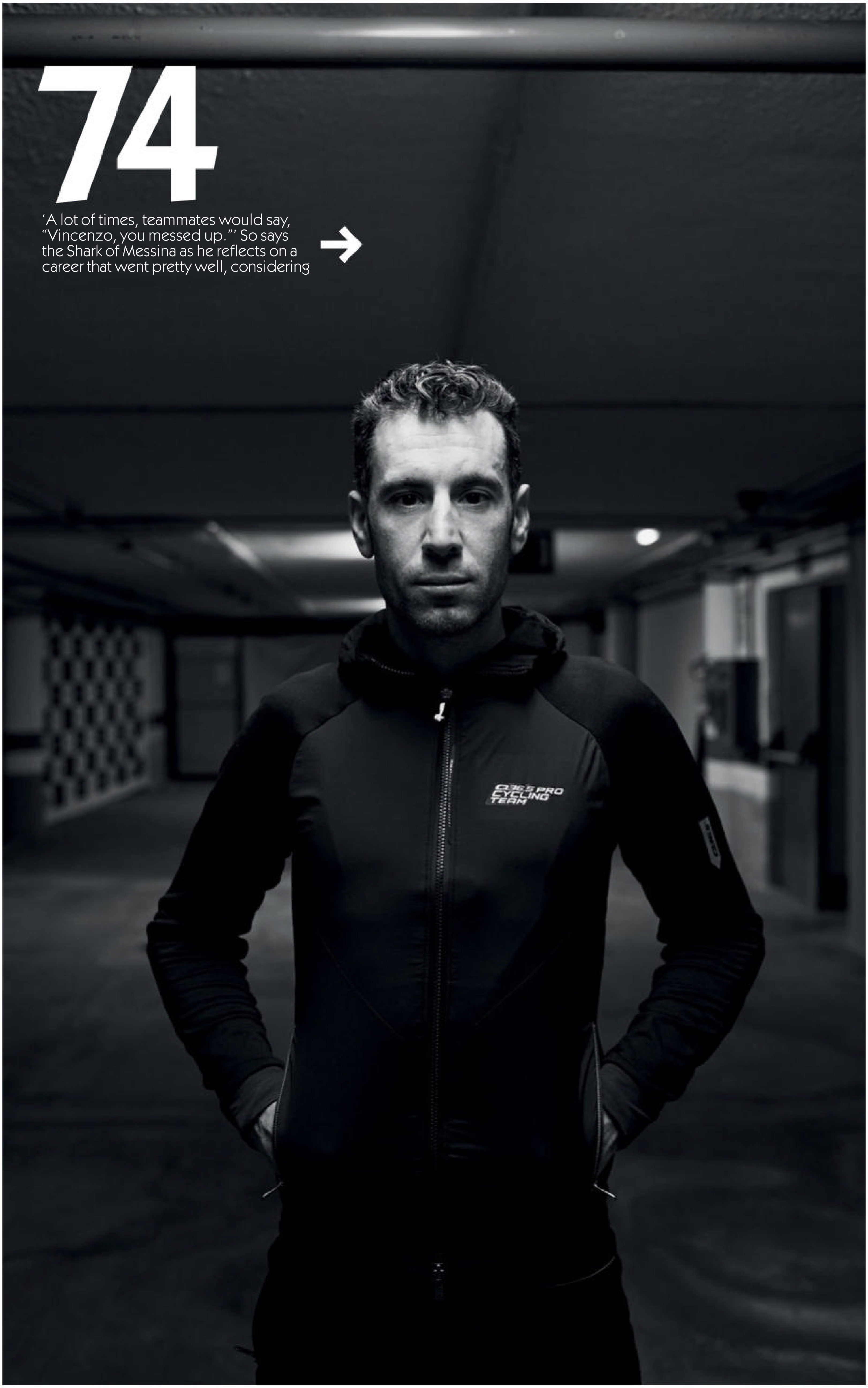

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'A lot of times, teammates would say, "Vincenzo, you messed up."' So says the Shark of Messina as he reflects on a career that went pretty well, considering →

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Welcome

Photo **Matt Grayson**

98

The Race Around Rwanda is a bikepacking odyssey that's not for the faint of heart. Find out why in this issue's Insight feature

Welcome to yet another jam-packed edition of *Cyclist* Australia/NZ. We're thrilled to present you with our latest collection of gear and bike reviews, in-depth features, sit-down interviews with cycling's biggest stars, and of course, stunning visuals and stories from our riding adventures at home and around the world.

Our local Big Ride destination for this issue takes us to the town of Tallangatta in Victoria's High Country, the gateway to the hidden gem that is Lake Hume – right on the Victoria-NSW border. Our team followed the shoreline of the man-made lake on a quiet, scenic loop offering incredible water views, challenging climbs and plenty of charming places to stop and fuel up along the way. It's also the location of the Sandy Creek Bridge, the architecturally impressive span that graces our gatefold cover for this issue. See the full Big Ride feature on page 58.

While some of the *Cyclist* team were out exploring new parts of Victoria's High Country, others had hopped on a plane overseas to explore a country we'd never visited prior: South Korea, and in particular the captivating island of Jeju. Here, we discovered a very different and very cool kind of cycling experience – think of it as a sort of nationwide treasure hunt on two wheels where visitors carry a cycling passport and collect stamps, stickers and even medals as they tick off the country's well-connected and mostly traffic-free routes. It's hard to explain in one short paragraph, so flick to page 116 to see the full story along with some of the wonderful images we captured along the way.

On page 98 we explore even further afield as we take an insider's look at the Race Around Rwanda. Hear from four riders who participated in this challenging annual bikepacking race as they share the triumphs, the setbacks, and the lifelong memories they created.

Of course, it's not all rides. We speak with two legends of the sport – Miguel Indurain and Vincenzo Nibali – to find out what they've been up to in retirement and get their thoughts on the current crop of WorldTour riders. We also catch up with Shirin van Anrooij, arguably the hottest prospect in women's cycling. Over to you, readers…

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Sign up for Melbourne's iconic United Energy Around the Bay 2023, set to take place on Sunday 8 October 2023.

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For further information visit bicyclenetwork.com.au/rides-and-events/around-the-bay, or scan the QR code.

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BLACK BAY CHRONO

116

Fancy a ride? Our team recently journeyed to South Korea where they encountered a unique network of cycling infrastructure – oh, and this pony-shaped lighthouse

Photo **Nick Esser**

Cyclist

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Four of a kind

Cannondale's fourth SuperSix Evo gets better while staying the same ▶

Words **SAM CHALLIS**
Photography **TAPESTRY**

Back in 2008 Cannondale designed the original SuperSix based on the experience gained from the outgoing SystemSix race bike. The SuperSix quickly won a reputation for being light and stiff with deft handling, and in subsequent revisions Cannondale managed to blend comfort into the mix as well. This year the bike celebrates its 15th birthday and has come full circle in that for this fourth generation the SuperSix Evo has once again been informed by the brand's SystemSix bike, which was reintroduced in 2019 as Cannondale's aero road platform.

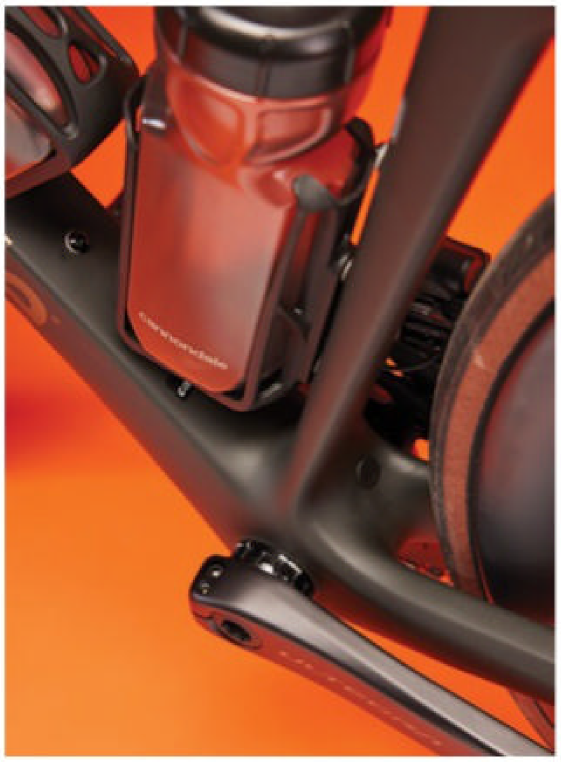
'We took the features that make the SystemSix so fast and made them lighter,' says Dr Nathan Barry, Cannondale's aerodynamics expert. 'The new SuperSix Evo is as fast as rival aero bikes while hitting the UCI minimum weight limit. The new bike is 12 watts more efficient than the old one at 45kmh.'

A new carbon composite blend that the brand dubs Series 0 means the claimed weight for a 56cm frame is just 770g. Depending on spec, a full build can hit 6.8kg or even dip below it.

'Series 0 now sits above our Hi-Mod frameset tier and forms part of our Lab71 collection, which includes no-technological-holds-barred designs to showcase what we can do as a brand,' says Sam Ebert, Cannondale's road product manager. 'Series 0 uses a special carbon fibre that has just been made available to the bike industry. The stiffness properties it offers means where we used to need two plies of fibre, we can now use one. The new material plus our nano-resin means we can make a faster frame with no penalty to stiffness or weight.'

Business at the front

As well as boasting new carbon, the SuperSix now has a front end that's more smoothly integrated



Cannondale SuperSix Evo Hi-Mod 2, $11,999, cannondale.com/en-au

than its predecessor thanks to a new Delta steerer design. While it is round at the fork crown, the upper half of the steerer is shaped like a slice of pizza, which creates room either side to route cables through the upper headset bearing while keeping the frontal profile narrow.

The higher-tier bikes will get a new SystemBar R-One lightweight integrated cockpit, although two-piece cockpits come as standard on lower-tier bikes. Cannondale now offers a Conceal stem through which cables can be routed, though, so even the lower-tier bikes will have a clean front end.

Party at the back

Moving towards the rear of the bike, changes to the upper half of the seat tube and seatpost are among the most visually evident. Both are now too skinny to accommodate a Shimano Di2 battery in its typical mounting spot so Cannondale has incorporated a dedicated sleeve in the bottom of the down tube to house the battery instead.

'Air increases in pressure as it's funnelled into the area between the rider's legs,' says Barry. 'It's important to make that part of the bike as aero as possible because it has a disproportionate effect on drag.'

Cannondale says the look of the bike was an important consideration, so has sweated the small stuff in the finishing details. The SuperSix comes with slimline bottles that help aerodynamics, conventional thru-axles replace the increasingly esoteric Speed Release standard and the non-driveside fork leg now has a hidden thru-axle thread to create a clean look.

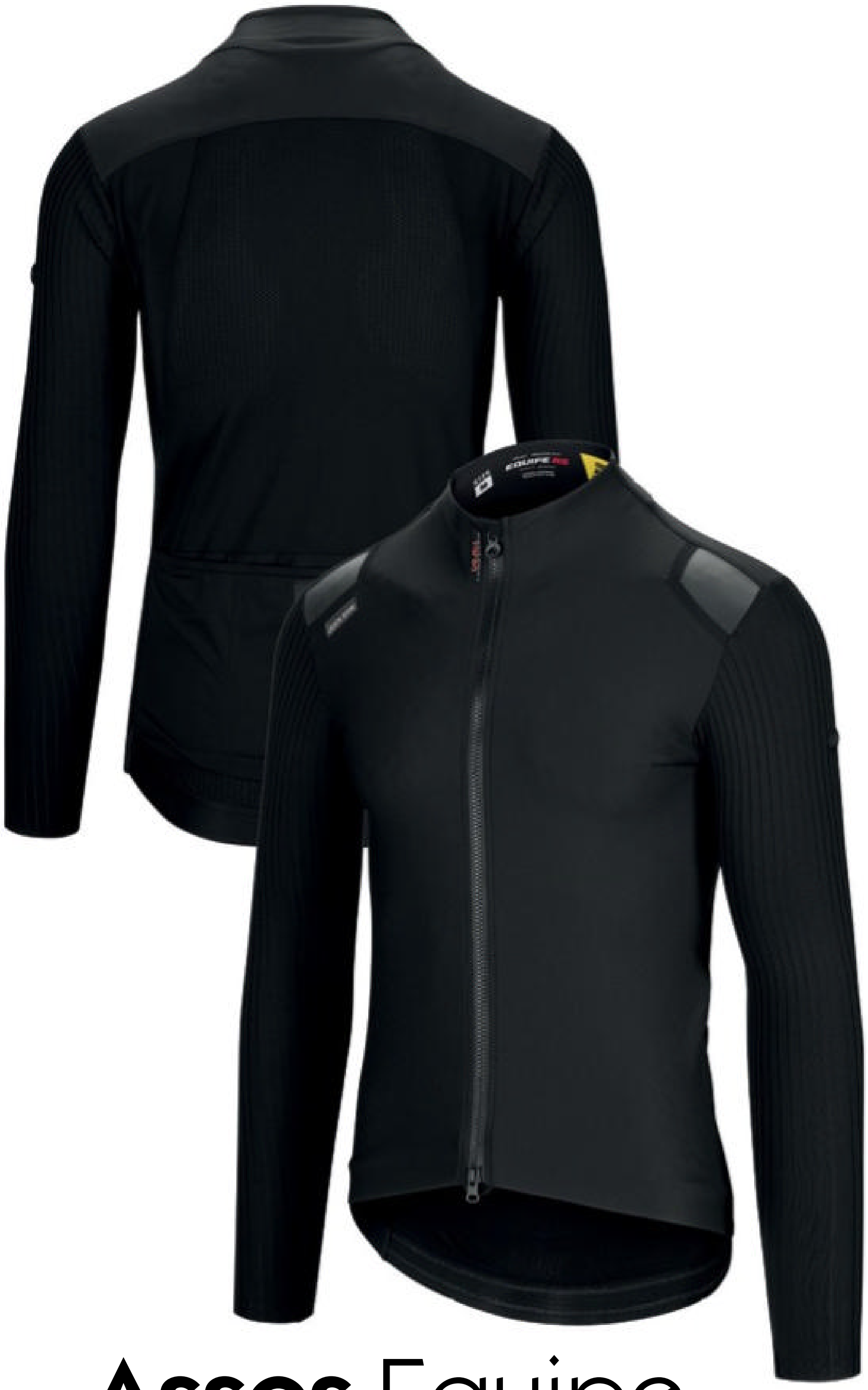
The manufacturer cites useability as its justification for switching back to a BSA threaded bottom bracket.

> 'The SuperSix Evo's geometry has been carried over – there are some things you know not to mess with'

'Drivetrains are so good these days that we don't need to compensate for them as much in the frame design,' says Ebert. 'Our knowledge of frame construction is better than ever too – BSA mandates a narrower bottom bracket junction but we can create performance at that junction similar to wider press-fit solutions with the added reliability and serviceability of a threaded system.'

For those concerned that all these changes might spoil what was already a great bike, Ebert says Cannondale consciously preserved the platform's best-loved features. Stiffness is said to be comparable, as is comfort despite the deeper seatpost, thanks to compensatory tweaks elsewhere in the frame architecture. Tyre clearance remains at 34mm.

'And of course, the SuperSix Evo's geometry has been carried over as well,' says Ebert. 'There are some things you just know not to mess with.'



Assos Equipe RS Spring Fall Jacket Targa

$519.95, assos.com/au

Introducing the Assos Equipe RS Spring Fall Jacket Targa, a versatile garment that aims to bridge the gap between a thermal long-sleeve jersey and a low-volume softshell. Designed to offer enhanced thermal protection, reflective panelling and built-in ventilation, it's ideal for training sessions as the weather turns colder, providing a warmer alternative to the traditional combination of a thermal short-sleeve jersey, arm warmers and a vest.

Crafted from a combination of Assos's summer-jersey Push Pull textile and the highly insulating 'Rhombus' liner, the jacket's front panel boasts stretchability, breathability, and aerodynamic properties while effectively trapping heat.

The raw-cut full-length sleeves feature what Assos calls SONIC-SN fabric, known for its elasticity and snug fit, complete with a brushed micro-sanded lining for additional thermal protection.

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58 km
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37%
POTENTIAL
68%
83
AVG 163
MAX 336
170
AVG 155
MAX 182
GARMIN
Climb 1/4
↑1215 m
↓1215 m
1 7%
27.4 km
↔1.2 km
↑120 m
2 6%
43.4 km
↔11.4 km
↑700 m
GARMIN

The Garmin Edge 840 can be operated via touchscreen whereas the Edge 540 is 100% button-operated

Garmin Edge 540/840 bike computers

$599 (Edge 540), $749 (Edge 540 Solar), $749 (Edge 840), $879 (Edge 840 Solar), garmin.com/en-au

There's a suite of improvements to the Garmin Edge 540 and 840 from their predecessors, the most significant being the option for solar charging. Solar models use Garmin's Power Glass to harness the sun and turn it into battery power, adding a claimed 25 minutes per hour during daytime riding – a huge win for those who ride pro hours, though for others, it may not be a factor given the already impressive 26-hour run time with non-solar models. But, certainly, no one in the *Cyclist* office has ever begrudged additional battery life.

The 540 and 840 are almost identical, each with a 2.6" screen and 80g weight. They use multi-band GNSS, which is the leading GPS system globally, and offer targeted adaptive coaching to a rider based on recent training loads and other factors including sleep quality if the owner also has Garmin wearables. The main difference between the pair is the 840 can be operated with a touch screen or buttons, whereas the 540 has no touch screen.

One thing we love at *Cyclist* is the ClimbPro ascent planner, bringing Garmin into line with other computers we've tested and giving the rider real information about an upcoming climb (length, gradient, elevation) automatically. This feature used to only be accessible with loaded routes but now shows up on any hill longer than 500 metres and steeper than 3% grade.

There are other storage and capability upgrades (which most riders won't need) so we recommend getting your hands on both models at your local dealer to see whether the touch screen on the 840 is worth an extra $150.

KASK
ONE CHOICE MANY PATHS
SINTESI

vittoria CORSA PRO CONTROL
GRAPHENE

The Corsa Pro Control has a fishbone texture for – yep, you guessed it – improved control in all conditions

Vittoria Corsa Pro and Corsa Pro Control tyres

We tested Vittoria's new top-of-the-range road tyres so that we too could 'feel what the pros feel'. Here's what we felt...

Words **JACK LYNCH**

As usual, Vittoria has pushed itself to a higher threshold with the Corsa Pro and Corsa Pro Control, which replace the previous TLR versions, the Corsa and Corsa Control tyres. Like all new releases, they promise to be faster, lighter and more puncture-resistant than previous iterations. And even though it's almost impossible to feel minor improvements on the road, fitting a fresh pair of tubeless 28s to my bike is always exciting and makes me want to get out and ride.

These Corsas have a familiar tread pattern and employ trickle-up technology from the more durable Corsa, the Corsa Next (normally branded as N.EXT). A mix of graphene and silica compound adds hardiness and grip to the tread compared with previous iterations and makes the Corsa Pro an option for fast bunch riders, not just pro-level racers.

Same but different

The Corsa Pro and Pro Control are touted as Vittoria's fastest tubeless tyres. They can both run on hookless rims and have thin beads for ease of fitting, or to run tubes if you're that way inclined.

When comparing the boxes, it's a bit of a game of spot the difference, with both aimed at pro competition level, both employing the same 320 TPI cotton casing, and both using all the same esoteric Vittoria technologies. However, the Corsa Pro Control shows its hand as the more durable model, quoted on the box as being 'top rough-road racing performance' whereas the Corsa Pro's first listed feature is 'speed and grip'. Of course, if you were to miss the hints on the box, the tread pattern on the tyres also indicates their use if you look hard enough – the Corsa Pro Control has minor etchings on Corsa's famous parallel tread to provide more grip in varied conditions and road surfaces.

Vittoria Corsa Pro TLR and Corsa Pro Control TLR each retail at $144.95

See vittoria.com for further details

In something of a breakthrough, Vittoria engineers managed to incorporate the rubber tyre tread with the cotton casing via a new and more sustainable electrical vulcanisation. Through this process, the rubber tread is completely embedded with the casing, which ensures the tread doesn't detach from the sidewall for added confidence and grip.

Weighing them up

As a non-professional, choosing which one to try first was easy. I went with the Corsa Pro Control, as it seems to give me more across a broader range of conditions and surfaces and its only 25 grams heavier than the Pro. (I measured the Control at 308 grams.)

It's no surprise the Corsa Pro Control made me feel fast, confident and keen to press through the corners. The road cycling world is playing limbo with tyre pressures so we feel grippier and more comfortable; given this, I can't say for sure if my confidence was due to the tyre or the lower pressures I run now compared to a few years back.

Similarly, I don't know if it was luck or tyre quality, but I didn't get a flat during the test period. Punctures, as we all know, are a game of luck. Just ask two of our favourites, Mathieu van der Poel and Wout Van Aert, who have both been riding the Corsa Pro since the start of 2023. MVDP won Milan San Remo and Paris Roubaix on Corsa Pros and was greatly assisted in Roubaix by Wout's puncture just 15km from the finish. Sometimes it's fortune rather than equipment that lets you down.

Everyone knows and respects Vittoria for what they do across a broad range of tyres. If you're looking to get everything out of yourself and your bike through premium tyres, the Corsa Pro and Pro Control are for you. If you're more concerned with durability, look to the Corsa Next for the best of all worlds.

vittoria CORSA PRO
GRAPHENE

Kask Utopia Y helmet

$410, kask.com

The Utopia was developed in 2018 to combine aerodynamic efficiency with ventilation. The fact that it became the go-to helmet for WorldTour team Ineos Grenadiers in fast, flat races (when they also had helmets such as Kask's well-regarded Protone Icon to choose from) suggests that Kask got the blend about right.

Five years later, the release of the Utopia Y could be seen as further evidence of the original's efficacy because, superficially, little has changed. Its sculpted shape is the same but there have been changes under the surface – chiefly the incorporation of the Octofit+ retention system that the aforementioned Protone Icon debuted.

Kask says Octofit+ uses a larger rotational dial that is coated in a grippier rubber to make it easier to adjust, and the cradle arrangement has been enlarged to promote a more secure fit.

The interior has been improved too, with Kask making more liberal use of its Resistex Carbon padding. The Resistex Carbon yarns that are woven into the fabric don't absorb sweat, meaning the padding transports moisture away effectively, and they have antibacterial properties too.

The subtle updates mean the helmet stays at the same competitively light weight of 258g for a size medium. In terms of rotational safety, Kask says the new helmet passes its own WG11 impact test, though the helmet is yet to be independently verified by an authority such as Virginia Tech.

KASK
UTOPIA
KAS

Octofit+ system features a larger dial for easier adjustment as well as a larger cradle for a more comfortable fit

Cinturato
GRAVEL RC
ROTATION

Pirelli Cinturato Gravel RC tyres

$124.99, fesports.com.au

The variable nature of gravel terrain – from rubble to mud to tarmac – necessitates a versatile tread pattern, particularly in a race situation. Pirelli says its new Gravel RC tyre blends the fast-rolling centre tread of its Gravel H tyre with the aggressive side knobbles of its Scorpion XC RC mountain bike tyre in an attempt to achieve both speed and grip.

In another example of manufacturers blending riding categories, a cut-resistant TechWall fabric is deployed bead-to-bead, which Pirelli says protects the tyre from sharp objects piercing the tread on the road and the side walls being slashed by rocks off it.

Magicshine
Magene

The Seemee 508 has a 220-degree-wide visibility angle and a visibility range of up to 1.2km

Magicshine Seemee 508 radar tail light

$199, magischine.com.au

Magicshine has produced a great-value alternative to Garmin's Varia radar and rear light. In case you're unfamiliar, radars can detect vehicles behind the rider and send the information to a paired bike computer. For city riders on busy roads, this can seem like an unnecessary innovation. However, riders who are regional, ride early or stay on quieter routes often find it a useful tool to complement (not replace) their eyes and ears.

The Seemee 508 indicates approaching cars from 140 metres away with angles up to 40 degrees, meaning it can spot rearward vehicles from around the bends. Different bike computers will display this information on the head unit in different ways, but the information will usually be on the right side of your computer, using little car icons travelling closer to you.

We've seen a few Magicshine lights in recent months and have been impressed with run time and brightness. This model is no different, working between four and 18 hours depending on the setting, and pumping out solid lumens in a 220-degree angle giving you confidence that drivers can see you if approaching side-on.

Küat Piston SR roof rack

$1,099, fesports.com.au

Küat creates a wide range of high-end bike, water and snow carriers for your car and the roof-mounted Piston SR is about one of the nicest bike racks we've seen.

The sleek design has a 30kg carrying capacity and can support a massive five-inch tyre. When fastening your bike, it doesn't contact the frame at all, instead fixing to the tyres using hydro-pneumatic arms clad in the ultra-durable Kashima coating, synonymous with Fox mountain bike shocks and forks. The appearance and functionality add up to one seriously deluxe bike carrier and we can't wait to see them out in the wild.

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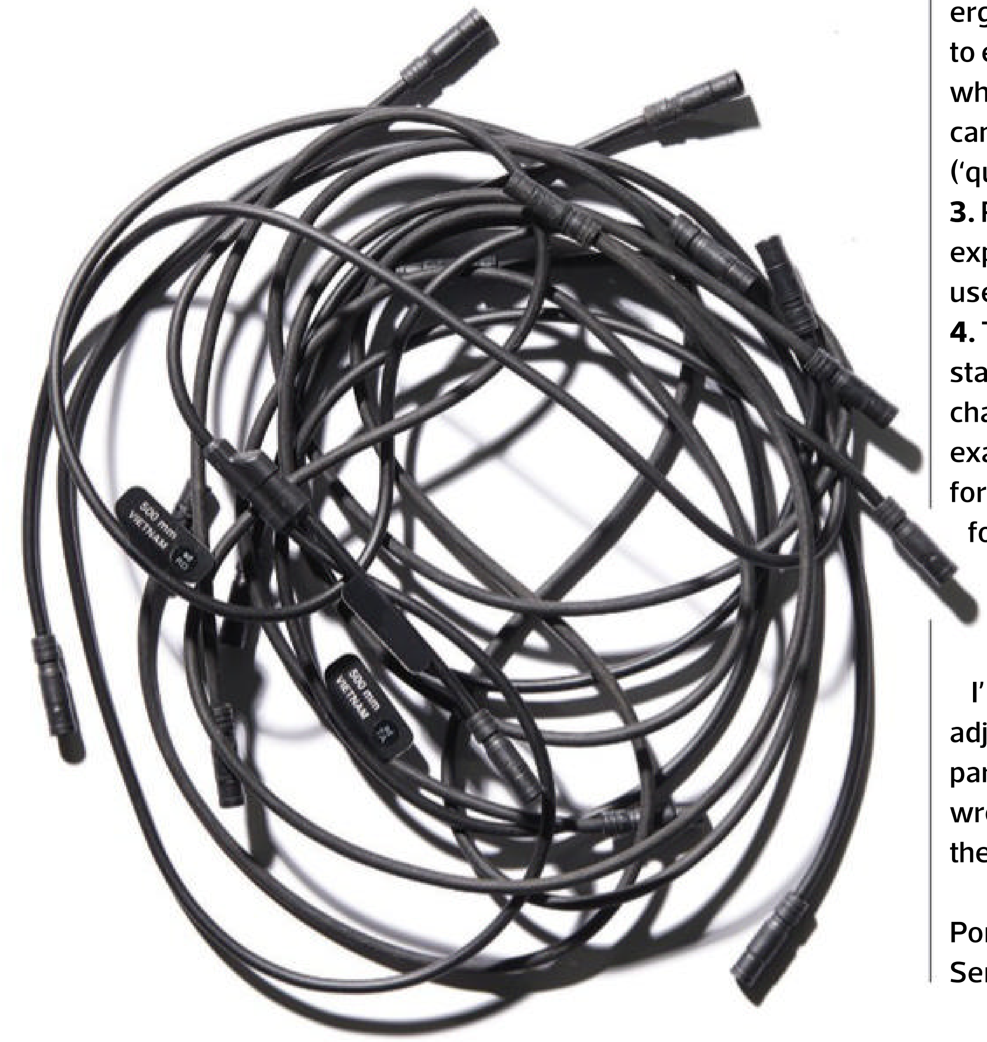
Down with electronic shifting!

They may be clever, but do electronic groupsets actually make a bike better? Pete Muir thinks not

It's natural to want to make improvements. We're hardwired to expect better and to constantly strive for growth. No business can afford to keep producing the same old product when customers are demanding something new. Whatever it is you make, you have to make it bigger, faster, smarter, sleeker, with more buttons and extra flashing lights. It has to be ergonomically optimised, voice-activated and incorporate space-age materials with micro-this and nano-that. And it has to have an app. Everything has to have an app.

The problem is, when it comes to the bicycle, they pretty much got it right first time. Look at 'safety bicycles' from the late 1800s and they're remarkably familiar. The double-triangle frame, the forks and steerer, the drivetrain, the pedals, the saddle... all the same, which means that for over 100 years bike makers have been tinkering around the edges in search of things to change.



True, some of those changes have been genuine improvements. Who would trade their lightweight carbon for heavy iron, or go back to solid rubber tyres instead of pneumatic? But some of them seem like progress for progress's sake. And one of those – in my ever so humble opinion – is the electronic groupset.

Hear me out

'But electronic groupsets are great – you just press the button and it changes gear.'

What, you mean exactly like with a mechanical groupset? Yes, you have to press the lever a bit harder, but who ever came back from a century ride saying, 'My legs are fine, but my fingers are exhausted from all those gear changes!'

To my mind, the benefits of electronic seem particularly minimal, while the disadvantages are manifold. So let's get listing:

1. The weight. Electronic groupsets are heavier than mechanical ones. Not by much, and I don't really care about a few extra grams, but it's still worth mentioning and getting out of the way.

It shouldn't need to be plugged in. The bike is the most efficient mode of transport ever invented, and its beauty lies in its simplicity

2. The fiddly buttons. Again, better than they used to be ('improved ergonomics!') but it can still be hard to even know if you've changed gear when you're wearing gloves and you can't hear the whir of the servomotor ('quieter than ever!').

3. Price. Electronic things are just more expensive than mechanical things. Get used to it, schmuck.

4. The risk of running out of juice. The standard answer to this is, 'But one charge can last months.' Which is exactly the problem. If there's no need for regular charges, you're more likely to forget, and more likely to have it fizzle out on you when you're 80km from home with a storm coming.

5. No home maintenance. In truth, I'm a lousy mechanic, but even I can adjust a mechanical derailleur, replace parts and bodge a fix when things go wrong. With an electronic derailleur there's no chance.

Last year I was on a ride in northern Portugal, which included the mighty Serra da Estrela climb – 21km and 1,440m of ascent – when my ride partner's Di2 electronic groupset failed. We tried every reset method, but she was trapped in a 34/14 gear.

Fortunately she was a former pro, and so simply cranked up the mountain in a display of strength that left me breathless with admiration. But it also left me wary of relying on electronics when far from home. Would anyone choose Di2 for a round-the-world ride?

Keep it simple, stupid

Beyond all these practical considerations, however, there is simply the principle of the thing: bikes shouldn't need to be plugged in. The bicycle is the single most efficient mode of transport ever invented. In terms of speed and distance out for energy in, nothing can match it, and its beauty lies in its simplicity.

I love that the bicycle requires no input other than muscle power, and it generates no emissions other than body heat. It doesn't rely on access to the grid or a petrol station. It won't stop functioning when the Wi-Fi goes down, and it will continue to work even after the total collapse of society.

There is a purity to the bicycle that deserves to be revered and protected, which is why my heart sinks a little more every time another update to a top-end groupset appears with the words 'electronic-only'. How soon will it be before the urge to grow, to find improvements – real or imagined – means that mechanical groupsets will be confined only to the lowest tiers in the big manufacturers' line-ups?

In the words of German-British economist Ernst F Schumacher: 'Any intelligent fool can make things bigger and more complex. It takes a touch of genius and a lot of courage to move in the opposite direction.'

Pete Muir has long been a champion of cycling innovation – so long as innovation involves making bikes more comfortable for his ageing body parts.

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Miguel Indurain

The five-time Tour de France winner talks to *Cyclist* about why he never won on cobbles, what he thinks of the current generation of riders and *that* resting heart rate

Words **TREVOR WARD**
Photography **ANDREW GRANT**

Cyclist: Can we check your pulse?

Miguel Indurain: Let me see if I can find it. I think it's 45.

Cyc: How does it feel to have been regarded as a specimen on display because of your low resting heart rate (28bpm), huge lung capacity and high VO_2 max?

MI: Specimen? I suppose it's true I was. But actually, in my time we were all tested regularly and there were lots of other riders who were in great physical condition too. But they didn't have the mental capacity to make the most of those attributes so their results were never reported.

You have to be very strong mentally. A lot of riders are prepared physically but it's the mental side that gives you the edge. These days riders have all kinds of sports psychologists to help them but in my day we had to prepare on our own as best we could.

Cyc: You were renowned for looking serene and effortless on the outside. But what was going on inside?

MI: What you saw on the outside was pretty much what was on the inside too. I had faith in my training and preparation so once I was in the race I was focused on the job. I didn't have anything else going on in my head.

Cyc: What about equipment, especially for a time-trial specialist such as yourself? Are you envious of the technology available to riders today?

MI: No, because you've got to have all the physical qualities – you can't buy them. If you don't have the engine you haven't got anything. All the gains from aerodynamics and technology are added extras. Also, we had the best equipment that was available to us at that time, and I was happy with it.

Some of the biggest technological changes in cycling happened while I was racing, including tri-bars, which were first used by Greg LeMond in the 1989 Tour, and clipless pedals. The development that made the biggest change to my style of riding was when they switched the gear shifters from the down tube to the brake levers.

Cyc: Compared to your era, there are significantly fewer time-trial kilometres in Grand Tours these days. Do you think that's fair?

MI: It's a shame because time-trials are a sport within a sport and a really important part of cycling that takes as much mental skill as physical. People who think TTs are boring should find another sport to watch.

Cyc: Do you think it's possible for a rider to ever win five Tours again?

MI: I think there are riders who are good enough to do so but it's about much more than that. Winning five Tours is as much about luck – not crashing, not getting sick, not having a bad day. I had a lot of luck in five consecutive Tours.

Cyc: What do you think about the big names in the current peloton?

MI: I haven't met any of them personally but based on what I've seen I think Tadej Pogačar is a brave racer – he's not afraid to get in the mix, fight and attack. He's the complete cyclist, strong in time-trials as well as the mountains, but he has a lot of rivals.

I like how Primož Roglič has 'recycled' his career – from ski-jumping to cycling. He's a hard worker who would have had better results if he hadn't had such bad luck with crashes. Jonas Vingegaard won the Tour because he rode well within his team but I'm not sure he responds well to pressure. This year we have to wait and see how he manages the stress. He has to remember to enjoy the sport.

Wout van Aert is a big talent with a big engine. He can win what he wants: Classics, cross or sprints. Mathieu van der Poel is similar. He can choose whatever type of race he wants, but I don't think his mentality suits a three-week Grand Tour.

Remco Evenepoel is young and on the rise, and has shown great strength to come back from his crash at Lombardia [in 2020].

Cyc: Who will win this year's Tour?

MI: Vingegaard will be the favourite because he won it last year, but any of those other riders could cause him problems. It will be a very open race and there may even be a surprise winner.

Cyc: There are currently some great rivalries in the peloton: Van Aert v Van der Poel, Roglič v Remco. How important is rivalry within sport?

MI: If someone dominates easily without having to fight, it's not good for them or the sport. You almost have to be your own rival because you have to keep challenging yourself. But your biggest rival is the race itself. I never took anything or anyone for granted. Potentially every other rider was my rival.

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Cyc: Your physique would have suited the cobbled Classics and yet you never raced them. Any regrets?

MI: No. I actually raced Paris-Roubaix once, in 1989 I think, and only managed half of it. Everyone told me I'd be good at it because of my size and strength, but it wasn't for me, I didn't like anything – the pavé, the cold, the rain.

Cyc: You live near Pamplona, where they hold the 'running of the bulls' every July. Since retiring from bike racing, have you ever been tempted?

MI: Every July I was riding the Tour, and that was just like riding with 200 bulls, so I've never felt the need.

Cyc: How does a five-time Tour winner spend his days now?

MI: I live on my farm and still really love riding my bike but in a completely different way. Movistar are based in Pamplona but I've never been tempted to go into team management. I don't have the patience. I am invited to sportives and events where I meet people from all over the world and from different backgrounds, so I combine cycling with socialising and fun.

MIGUEL INDURAIN

Age 58
Born Villaba, Spain
Career teams
Reynolds/Banesto

Honours include...
Tour de France 1991, 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995; 12 stage wins (1989-1995)
Giro d'Italia 1992, 1993; 4 stage wins
Volta a Catalunya 1988, 1991, 1992
Paris-Nice 1989, 1990
Critérium du Dauphiné 1995, 1996
Olympic Games, Individual Time-Trial 1996
World Championships, Individual Time-Trial 1995

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The 'Big Six' risk making it dull

After Pogačar and Van der Poel dominated the spring and Remco strolled to Liège glory, are things about to get even more predictable when it comes to the Grand Tours, asks Felix Lowe?

The pool of talent battling it out for victories in cycling's major races is so strong yet so shallow that the opportunities for outsiders are getting fewer and farther between.

Entering the Giro d'Italia, and discounting the Tour de Romandie at the end of April, a staggering 12 of the 21 WorldTour events this season had been won by the same six riders: Tadej Pogačar, Jonas Vingegaard, Primoz Roglič, Remco Evenepoel, Wout van Aert and Mathieu van der Poel.

Take the final two Classics specialists out of the equation and focus on the last four stage races, and almost 50 per cent of stages from Paris-Nice, Tirreno-Adriatico, Catalunya and Itzulia combined have been won by those first four GC superstars who, between them, have gobbled up two-thirds of all the Grand Tours since 2020.

That's the negative way of looking at it. You could say, on the other hand, that the volume and calibre of these absorbing rivalries is unlike anything we have seen before; that, as fans, we are being spoiled rotten, race after race, by the blow-by-blow battles between the so-called 'Big Six'. Which makes it so frustrating when, say, van Aert picks up a puncture at the key moment of Paris-Roubaix, gifting a cobblestone trophy to van der Poel because there's nobody left to bring the flying Dutchman back down to earth.

It was a similar dilemma for anyone trying to maintain a modicum of interest in April's Liège-Bastogne-Liège. The final Monument of the spring is a tough viewing experience even on the best of days, but once Pogačar crashed out before the TV cameras had even started rolling, we were denied a rare head-to-head showdown between two of the sport's most exciting riders. If only some of the other superstars had bothered to turn up, we may have had a race on our hands, not a rainbow cake-walk.

And then came the Giro. As we sent this issue to print, Evenepoel had just days earlier been forced to withdraw from the race due to a positive Covid test, denying us the prospect of another thrilling battle with Roglič.

Evenepoel's slow introduction to Grand Tours means the last time he and Pogačar featured together on the startlist of a WorldTour race was La Flèche Wallonne in 2022, where the latter was found out and the former a mere footnote.

Pogačar's crash and subsequent wrist injury in La Doyenne was a sad way for the Slovenian's stellar spring to end. Before Liège – when a rare Ardennes triple was still on the cards – some fans had started to bemoan his domination. Here was a Grand Tour specialist who had turned winning major Classics into a glorious side-hustle, snaring solo wins in the Tour of Flanders, Amstel Gold and La Flèche. All this following a hat-trick of stages in Paris-Nice while making the man whose yellow jersey he covets this July look fairly ordinary.

I wasn't among those complaining. Perhaps once it becomes a Merckxian pattern I'll start to zone out, but I was particularly impressed by Pogačar's wins this spring because of the way he learned from his mistakes. Most notably, his Ronde success and Mur de Huy exploits came 12 months after his limitations and inexperience were shown up in those very same races.

Irrespective of his current recovery, Pogačar is not due to line up against Vingegaard again until the Tour de France, while Evenepoel's focus on the Giro meant that we likely won't see the Belgian World Champion enter this particular battlefield until 2024 at the earliest. Which is precisely why the Giro – which saw a renewal of Evenepoel's Grand Tour rivalry with Roglič from La Vuelta – was so appealing. At least, until that damn Covid test.

It begs the question: should the UCI actively do more to ensure the sport's best riders appear alongside each other on the startlists of major races more frequently?

There's a lesson to be learned here. Having all the big names ride against each other is partly what has made the Women's WorldTour races so compelling this year, and it would be great to see the men do the same. It's a controversial idea, wholly against the organic nature of riders choosing their calendar in a tactical manner based on form and circumstance, but could the sport's governing body not at least designate certain events where all the 'Big Six' *must* turn up and go hell for leather?

Now that's something I'd look forward to viewing far more than Netflix's sideways glance at the Tour de France – and certainly far more than the prospect of another two-horse race rendered irrelevant once one of the steeds goes lame.

There's a lesson to be learned here. Having all the big names ride against each other is partly what has made the Women's WorldTour races so compelling this year

Photo **Danny Bird**

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Q&A

Shirin van Anrooij

At 21 years old, Shirin van Anrooij is arguably the hottest prospect in women's cycling, recently winning her first elite road title, Trofeo Alfredo Binda, just six weeks after winning the U23 cyclocross world title

Words **JAMES WITTS** Photography **DAN KING**

Santini
TREK
Segafredo

Cyclist: You've had an incredible three or four months where success seems to have bred success…

Shirin van Anrooij: I feel like I did as a second-year junior when everything just clicked. You fall into this positive flow and you just want to keep going. I made a big step up in Trek-Segafredo's December training camp, which gave me confidence for the cyclocross season. My winter aim was to secure my first cyclocross UCI World Cup podium, so to win three times and finish third overall was incredible.

Cyc: And that flow has continued into the start of the road season.

SvA: In the winter, so many road cyclists are doing base miles and building endurance, and that's not always possible because of cyclocross, but it does mean you start the road season strongly because you've essentially had a winter of interval training. It also sets you up for a race like Strade [Bianche, where she was ninth in 2022] and its gravel roads.

Cyc: You rose to prominence by winning the young rider classification at last year's Tour de France Femmes. How did you feel about your new-found fame?

SvA: The attention was overwhelming with the fans and all the media but I really enjoyed it. I wasn't down to race, and it was only around three weeks before that I was brought in. It was into the unknown as I'd never ridden a multi-stage race longer than four days but I felt good until the final day, when I just felt tired. It was also the first time I'd had to get used to such an intense period of fuelling on gels and bars – I felt full but I knew I needed to eat more. It was a big learning experience.

'I've always loved riding my bike. My friends would tell tales of partying and getting drunk, while I'd be telling them stories of how I'd be racing hard in mud for an hour'

Cyc: We recently read Team DSM's nutritionist say there's a steep nutritional learning curve on the women's side. Is that your experience?

SvA: Yes, many female riders are scared to eat more because they're concerned they'll put on weight. Many of the men will be, 'Yeah, of course we need to eat because we're riding so much,' whereas the women can drive themselves crazy because they think losing weight means you'll be faster uphill. That's not the case. Thankfully, we have a great nutritionist who doesn't focus on the calculations. She doesn't want us counting calories or weighing food. She just doesn't want us feeling hungry and ensures we eat enough. Sometimes the female riders can be too hard on themselves. A cake treat is no bad thing.

Cyc: How did you first get into cycling?

SvA: My mother used to be a cyclist and so did my sister, so I began cycling early – I had my first road bike at five or six. I enjoyed athletics too and used to compete in triathlon. I enjoyed the riding and running but didn't love the swimming, so moved on. The junior national cycling coach then called me up and I ended up riding the UCI Junior Nations' Cup. It wasn't long before I'd signed to Trek-Segafredo as a stagiaire [in 2020], won the UCI Junior World Cyclocross Championships and earned my neo-pro contract.

Interestingly, I've started running again this winter. I run once a week with my brother. It helps with the cyclocross but I'm hoping to continue it through the summer. I find it relaxing and it's good for strengthening your bones. Our national team is increasingly focusing on bone density and has us skipping with a rope to drive up the impacts.

Cyc: Annemiek van Vleuten, Marianne Vos, Ellen van Dijk… The Netherlands has a great tradition of producing world-class cyclists. How come?

SvA: It starts from an early age as every kid goes to school by bike. My primary school was 1km away, then at high school it was 8km. We all rode. I'd ride on my heavy bike and then at home I'd swap for my road bike and train with friends. I know that's different to many countries. I remember talking to Elynor [Bäckstedt, teammate], who would always wear high-visibility clothing, have her lights on and even wear a GoPro in search of being safer. That would never cross my mind as it's so safe to ride your bike in the Netherlands. There are bike paths everywhere and you're just not afraid of being hit by a car.

Cyc: Some countries have reported a drop-off in the number of girls engaging in sport. Is that happening in the Netherlands?

SvA: Many of the girls I rode with didn't continue riding competitively but they continued to commute in their teenage years, which is so important for your mind and body. But I've always loved riding my bike. My friends would tell tales of partying and getting drunk, while I'd be telling them stories of how I'd be racing hard in mud for an hour. It also helps that I don't like alcohol. Yes, you make sacrifices in this sport, like missing out on friends' birthdays or concerts because you're travelling, training or racing, but I've always been goal-oriented. If I set myself a target, I'd regret it if I only gave 80%.

Cyc: Were you an academic youngster?

SvA: Yes, and I still am. I'm studying psychology and in the future would love to study sports psychology as a Masters. I started off by studying at Maastricht University but I needed to be there four times a week and it just became too much trying to balance that with my cycling. Now I study online and will complete it over five or six years. When I get home from a ride, I can watch the lecture so it's pretty easy.

Cyc: Finally, how's the rest of your season panning out?

SvA: After Binda the focus is on the Ardennes Classics. I love races like La Flèche Wallonne as I love those hills. Mind you, I don't know why the Dutch riders are so often good at hills as we don't have many of them. My plan is to support Elisa [Longo Borghini] and Amanda [Spratt] at La Vuelta, and then it's on to Vuelta a Burgos Feminas followed by an altitude camp, which I usually respond positively to, before the time-trial nationals.

This is an important race as I'll look to qualify for the time-trial worlds in Glasgow. With Annemiek [van Vleuten] talking of retiring this year, I might also have a chance of racing the 2024 Olympic time-trial for the Netherlands. And I'm racing the Giro d'Italia Donne [30 June – 9 July] instead of the Tour. I'll go there as a protected rider but not yet GC. But ultimately I think that's where my future lies. As do my coaches.

SHIRIN VAN ANROOIJ
Age 21
Born Goes, Netherlands
Team Trek-Segafredo

Notable results
2023
1st, Trofeo Alredo Binda
1st, U23 UCI Cyclocross World Championships

2022
1st, Stage 1, Ceratizit Challenge by La Vuelta
1st, Youth Classification, Tour de France Femmes
1st, U23 Time-Trial, European Championships

2021
1st, Youth Classification, Tour de Feminin

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Q&A

Arvid de Kleijn

The Dutchman recently left his mark on the UCI ProSeries when he sprinted to victory in the fastest ever edition of the world's oldest cycling race, Milano-Torino. We caught up with him to find out how he and his new team, Tudor Pro Cycling, are coming along

Words **JACK LYNCH**

Cyclist: Congratulations on your season so far, some strong results in UAE Tour (two top fives) and a win at the Milano-Torino. How do you feel this season is going and what is your next goal?

Arvid de Kleijn: Thanks! We had a good start of the season in UAE and we felt confident that we could deliver a big result in the weeks after that.

Cyc: The Torino win must be a career highlight. What were you thinking as you were outsprinting the likes of Fernando Gaviria and Nacer Bouhanni? And can you do it again?

AdK: In the moment itself, you're just in the moment. I was only thinking about going as fast as possible to the line. We were feeling well prepared after a productive meeting with the staff and the other riders the day before. We all believed we had the capacity to win, and we did. Can we do it again? I believe we can. But you'll have to wait and see!

'When one team member starts to win, the others believe they can do it too. All of a sudden, the whole team feels capable of winning'

Cyc: Tudor Pro Cycling has had a solid start since debuting in 2023, with your Torino win its first. Now with Alex Kamp having a top 10 at Amstel Gold, how can you capitalise on the belief and momentum?

AdK: Yes, it's been a great start to the year. The vibe within the team is unbeatable at the moment. When one team member starts winning or riding well, the others believe they can do it too. All of a sudden, the whole team feels capable of winning.

Cyc: At 29 years old, you are certainly not a veteran in the peloton, but you are one of the older riders at Tudor. How do you see your role binding the team?

AdK: Age is just a number. I became pro at a late age, and I haven't had a long career as a pro yet. I guess you could say I'm a late bloomer, so I'm looking forward to the years to come and where they will take me. As the sprinter, I also have the role of leading the sprinting group. In the team meetings, I tell the guys what I need and what I would like in the final. We discuss it as a team, and then with the staff, and that is how we come up with a plan for each race.

Cyc: A lot was made about Fabian Cancellara's role in Tudor Pro Cycling. How hands-on is Fabian in the team management?

AdK: It's super nice to have Fabian in the team. Of course, he's the founder of the team, but also attends a lot of the races himself. That is a big benefit for us as a team. He shares with us his vision, his experience and offers advice. This really helps to lift the whole team.

Cyc: Who in the team is the most exciting to watch out for in the future? I'd imagine you and Alex Kamp are the top dogs in the squad, but who will help propel you forward against the WorldTour teams?

AdK: We have a comparatively young team, with lots of talent. It's too hard for me to pick just one who will play this role as there are many talented riders who could do this.

Cyc: Is a rider you like to model yourself on?

AdK: I've always admired Mark Cavendish and it's an honour to race against him these days. I'm trying to beat him as much as possible!

Cyc: What is your favourite race? And if you could win one race in the world, which would it be?

AdK: Milano-Torino will from here on be my favourite race. But if I had to choose one race to win, it would definitely be the World Championship.

Cyc: Have you had a chance to race many Australians? Do they have a reputation in the bunch ? Be honest!

AdK: Probably – I don't really know how many for sure. I can tell you that both Caleb Ewan and Sam Welsford have a reputation for being really nice guys who are super relaxed and social, and I tend to agree.

Cyc: It feels like the team has some of the best equipment in the bunch: BMC bikes, Assos clothing, DT Swiss wheels. Have you ever ridden in a team where you felt hindered by the equipment? Or is a bike just a bike to you?

AdK: The gear we have in the Tudor Pro Cycling team is world-class – we're really happy with all the equipment we get to use. There were some teams in the past where the equipment wasn't the best and that's what makes me appreciate our equipment even more.

Cyc: Now tell us… how many Tudor watches have you received since racing for the team?

AdK: I received one really nice team watch, which I received when I joined the Tudor Pro Cycling team, along with the other riders. They're incredible watches. I would love to win more races so that I can afford another!

Arvid De Kleijn
Age 29
Born Herveld, Netherlands
Team Tudor Pro Cycling

Notable results

2023
1st Milano–Torino

2022
1st Stage 1, Tour of Dunkirk

2021
1st, Stage 1, Tour of Turkey
1st Route Adélie

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A moment in time

The first foreign Grand Départ

More than 50 years after its inaugural edition, the Tour de France staged the Grand Départ on foreign roads for the first time ever

Words **GILES BELBIN**

It's the day before the start of the 1954 Tour de France and Amsterdam is in party mode. The Tour circus is in town. Funfairs have sprung up all over the city and thousands of people are on the streets. Squares are full of market stalls and organ music. Cars displaying the exotic names of French newspapers, television and radio stations are on the roads. The city's youth are crowded around the advertising trucks of large French companies.

In the words of the Dutch daily *Het Vrije Volk*, today Amsterdam has 'a somewhat Latin atmosphere'. Tonight the shops and bars and cafes will do a roaring trade as they stay open until the small hours.

'We haven't seen Amsterdam like this since the coronation days of 1948,' the newspaper will report. 'Even at midnight it wasn't possible to get a seat on the cafe terraces of Leidseplein, Rembrandtplein and Damrak.'

Outside of Amsterdam's Olympic Stadium a large crowd has gathered. It is from here that tomorrow the Tour's peloton will be sent on its way. Riders are arriving to complete the pre-race formalities and locals want to catch sight of cycling's biggest stars off the bike. They line the road outside the stadium, five or six deep, waiting to see who they can glimpse.

First to arrive is Louison Bobet, the man who won the race last year and who will go on to win it again a little over three weeks from now. Then a sports car pulls up and out steps the Dutch rider Wout Wagtmans. Wagtmans is 24 years old and is a popular and talented rider – he already has two stage wins at both the Tour and the Giro to his name and has finished on the Paris-Roubaix and Liège-Bastogne-Liège podiums. Here he cuts a relaxed figure, with a large silk scarf tied around his neck and a cigar held between his smiling lips.

As the crowds watch, he presses the flesh before making his way into the stadium for his medical. Wagtmans doesn't know it yet but tomorrow he will enjoy the finest day of his career to date.

Widening the horizon

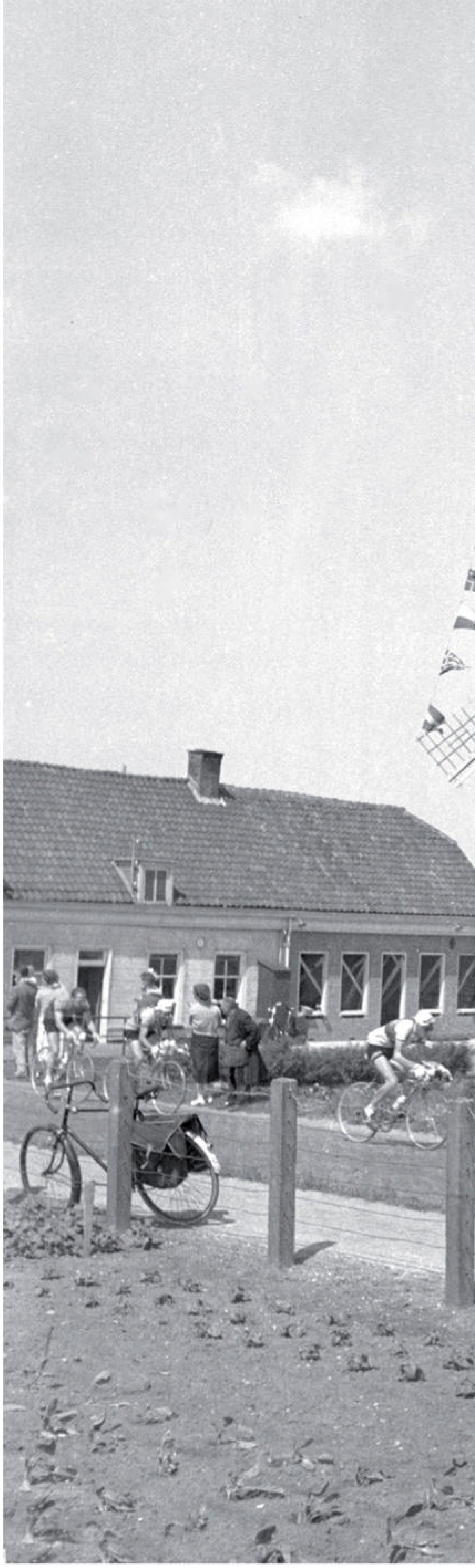
Before it arrived in Amsterdam in 1954, the Tour had never before held a Grand Départ on foreign soil. Indeed, in the 40 editions held between its inaugural race in 1903 and 1953, it had only ever started outside of the Paris area on four occasions: Évian (1926), Metz (1951), Brest (1952) and Strasbourg (1953). With three-quarters of those in the preceding three years, the principle of starting the race outside of the nation's capital city had at last been established. The next step was to broaden the race's horizons further still.

It was the performance of the Netherlands' team in the 1953 Tour that helped pave the way to Amsterdam. The race had been celebrating its 50th anniversary that year and the strong display of the ten-man Dutch squad (five stage wins and four riders in the top 20) had secured them the team prize and commemorative 'Desgrange' medals minted in celebration of the Tour founder.

In the 40 editions held between its inaugural race in 1903 and 1953, the Tour de France had only ever started outside of the Paris area on four occasions

The day after the 1953 race finished, the Dutch team was presented with bouquets and they posed for celebratory photographs at Amsterdam's Olympic Stadium. Little did they know that less than 12 months later they would be rolling out for the start of the 1954 race from the very same venue.

The Tour had been crossing France's borders mid-race into countries such as Germany, Switzerland and Belgium for many years but it had never ventured as far as the Netherlands – at a time when the norm was for stages to start



A strong showing from the Dutch team in 1953 helped secure the Grand Départ for Amsterdam the following year – and it would be a Dutch rider in yellow at the end of the first day

where the preceding leg had finished, it was logistically too difficult to take the race too far away from France's borders without spending multiple days beyond the host country's boundaries. However, the strong showing of the Dutch team in 1953 led to louder calls for the race to visit the country.

The Dutch formed an organising committee of interested parties, and discussions started. The only way the organisers could make it work was if the race started in the Netherlands and made its way to France through Belgium over the opening couple of stages. The question was whether Amsterdam could pull together the finances, hotel beds and logistical support necessary for a Grand Départ.

On 30th November 1953 it was reported that an Amsterdam Grand Départ for 1954 had been secured in principle, provided the Dutch authorities endorsed the proposal and that the necessary funding – some 80,000 francs – could be secured. A mix of private and public money was found and in late December Amsterdam's city council unanimously agreed to support the initiative.

There were still some hurdles to jump – the Dutch cycling federation stated as late as January 1954 that all talk of Amsterdam hosting the start was premature because they hadn't been asked to issue the requisite licence for the event – but ultimately the contracts would be signed and the permits would be issued. The Tour's first foreign Grand Départ was on.

And so, on 8th July 1954 at 11:30 am, the mayor of Amsterdam, Arnold Jan d'Ailly, cut the ceremonial start ribbon and 110 riders rolled out of the Olympic Stadium. The thousands that had been on the streets the night before were back out in force and the riders paraded through the streets of Amsterdam in front of huge crowds. Some 216km later Wagtmans, minus scarf and cigar, rode powerfully onto the finishing circuit in Brasschaat, near Antwerp, before leading a small bunch of 17 riders over the line.

Wagtmans' winning sprint and the resultant yellow jersey crowned a proud day for the Dutch, with the race's first foreign Grand Départ hailed a huge success.

'All of Holland seemed to have come together on the roads of the towns and villages that the Tour passed through,' *L'Equipe* reported. 'Tens and tens of thousands of spectators squeezed together in tight rows, for miles and miles, brandishing little blue, white and red flags, applauding, cheering everything related to the Tour. They were greeting the Tour which, for the first time ever, was paying them a visit and, from the first stage, they made it a triumph.'

Giles Belbin is the author of Tour de France Champions: An A To Z

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No free ride

Cyclists love a caffeine kick as much as anyone, but there's a price to be paid

Cyclists need no introduction to the benefits of caffeine. However, in a recent article on Australian academic news site *The Conversation*, University of Newcastle lecturer Dr Emma Beckett points out that much of the boost we get from a morning coffee or tea is more of a loan.

It all comes down to how the brain interacts with a compound called adenosine, which is released as a by-product of activity during the day, binding to receptors in our brain and telling our cells to slow down, which we feel as tiredness. Adenosine levels lower when we sleep and, provided we have slept long enough, we wake up feeling refreshed.

Caffeine is a similar shape to adenosine, and so also binds to the receptors but doesn't trigger the same slow-down signal to the cells. Yet by preventing adenosine from doing so, it effectively blocks the feeling of drowsiness.

This unattached adenosine doesn't go away, however. It remains in our system and latches back onto the receptors once the caffeine has broken down, bringing fatigue with it. As Dr Beckett puts it, 'The debt you owe caffeine always needs to be repaid, and the only real way to repay it is to sleep.'

So when it comes to combating fatigue, caffeine won't solve the problem entirely – it will just postpone it.

Photo Danny Bird

Berry nice breakfast

An oaty delight that proves great for fuelling

Huge congratulations to baked oats, which faced stiff competition but managed to secure ninth place in the prestigious roundup of most-searched food trends worldwide in 2021. Slotting between Tonjiru (a Japanese pork and vegetable soup) and overnight oats, their popularity was boosted by a baking frenzy exacerbated by the pandemic. It also helped that baked oats offer high protein and fibre blended with delicious toppings and a cake-like texture that champions indulgence for breakfast. The trend also went viral on TikTok, but let's not get into that.

In this recipe, *The Cycling Chef* Alan Murchison refutes the claim that baking oats is simply 'porridge with fancy pants on', instead taking people on a culinary journey reminiscent of old-school ice cream van flavours.

In performance terms, as well as the carbs and the protein, oats are rich in beta-glucan, a fibre that helps lower cholesterol levels and aids digestion. This recipe combines the oats with raspberries, which are high in antioxidants such as vitamins C and E, and bananas for a fuelling sweet treat to start the day.

Raspberry-banana ripple-baked oats

INGREDIENTS

100g oats
300ml boiling water
2 bananas, peeled
80g frozen raspberries
200ml almond milk
25g almonds (skin-on, crushed)
1 tsp cinnamon
1 tsp vanilla extract
2 tbsp honey
1 tbsp pumpkin seeds

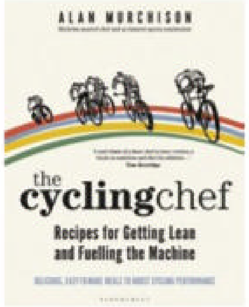
Makes 2 portions

Nutrition per serving	
Energy	502kcal
Total carbohydrate	72g (of which sugars 37g)
Fat	14g (of which saturates 1.7g)
Fibre	11g
Protein	13g
Salt	0.14g

Method

- Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F. Place the oats in a bowl and cover with boiling water, just so the top of the oats is covered. Soak for 10 minutes until softened. Not a second more.
- Slice one banana and mash the other in a bowl with a fork.
- Stir the mashed banana, raspberries, almonds, cinnamon, vanilla and half the honey and almond milk through the oats.
- Pour the mixture into an ovenproof dish and top with sliced banana.
- Spoon over the remaining honey and pumpkin seeds.
- Place in the centre of the oven and bake for 20-25 minutes until golden brown. While you might be tempted to eat it straight away, allow it to sit for 10 minutes to cool down slightly.

This recipe is taken from *The Cycling Chef: Recipes For Getting Lean And Fuelling The Machine* by Alan Murchison



Fix the foot

The human foot isn't made for cycling, says bike-fit expert Phil Cavell, which is why finding the right shoe is so important

True bipedalism in nature is very rare. We are the only mammals that decided to stand up out the primordial soup to walk upright around the planet, and over millions of years our feet have evolved to allow us to walk, run and jump. Then the bicycle is invented 150 years ago and the heel-to-toe movement phases the foot naturally moves through are suddenly superfluous, unhelpful even.

In walking and running, the foot goes through a dynamic phase of motion from heel-strike to mid-stance to a propulsive toe-off from the 1st met (big-toe joint). In contrast, cycling is about blocking movement to ensure that all the power is transferred from the foot into the base of the shoe and then directly into the pedal. We are asking the foot to work outside of its evolved remit, which may explain why foot problems are among the most commonly reported issues for cyclists.

WorldTour podiatrist Mick Habgood explains, 'A hotspot is easily created in the static environment of a stiff cycling shoe because one part of the foot is working harder than the others.' Yet he also adds, 'There exists an ideal shoe for every foot type.'

Ever done one like this?
V.23.
(Apologies to Bronzino + Python)

Illustration John Lynch

But how do you know what foot type you are? It starts with having your foot measured by a Brannock (foot measuring device) to establish the length and width of your foot – anything above a D width and you may need a shoe that comes in a wider option, such as Shimano, for example. You may find (especially if you have a high arch) that your foot size incrementally increases with age.

When you try shoes on you will want at least half a thumbnail width from the end of the longest toe to the end of the shoe and minimal overhang for either the first or fifth metatarsals (big and little toe-joints).

Next assess your foot shape – are your toes arranged in a dramatic curve or are they quite blocky and straight? If the latter is the case, then a square toe-box profile such as a Bont may feel the most comfortable.

> We are asking the foot to work outside of its evolved remit, which may explain why foot problems are the most commonly reported issues at Cyclefit for cyclists

Most importantly you will need to be cognisant of your foot shape under load and how that relates to each manufacturer's 'last' design ethos. The last is the internal mould that represents the foot shape for which the shoe has been specifically designed. Every manufacturer has an ideal foot in mind for their shoe.

Twist and shout

Habgood has observed that a significant proportion of us find that our feet 'pronate' under load. Pronation is a movement in three planes all at once: 'eversion' or tilting of the sole of the foot away from your body midline; 'forefoot abducts' – your toes move outward away from your body midline; 'dorsiflexion' – your toes move upwards. Supination, incidentally, is the opposite movement pattern and is much less common than pronation.

If you pronate and your forefoot is likely to abduct (toes turn out) under load, you may prefer a shoe with a straighter last shape: Bont, Bontrager, Specialized or Rapha, for example.

Let's assume you are now standing in the right-sized shoe with the best design for your foot – what else do you need to consider? For Habgood the objective is clear: 'Every time you have movement within the shoe you are losing the ability to produce power.'

The movement that Habgood wants to eliminate is the lateral rocking or pronation within the shoe. The aim is that the pedal moves as soon as the foot moves, with no delay. So you essentially have four options to get the foot locked within the shoe: the standard insole the shoe came with; an off-the-peg supportive footbed, such as ones from Bontrager or Specialized; a custom-moulded insert such as Sidas; or a prescription carbon cycling-specific orthotic.

The good news is that most of them will help, at least a little. If you have a strong and substantially neutral foot, then options one to three may work well. If, however, you have longstanding foot-loading issues, then a cycling orthotic is probably the best (although also the most expensive) option.

Most of the professional cyclists that we see have been through more than a few bike-fits in their careers, and are therefore notionally in an optimal position on their bikes. The only missing piece is often foot control and an unconscious compensation in their pedalling – with an inevitable loss of power and efficiency.

In summary, to fix the foot we need to 'fix' the foot – eliminating extraneous movement in the shoe to create a stable foundation for power transfer. Note that 'locking the foot down' doesn't translate into fixed cleats. Most riders need some cleat-to-pedal movement or there will be an unhelpful and possibly painful compensation one joint above – your knee.

But that's for another time.

Train smarter

Interval training can deliver maximum bang for your training buck, no matter your fitness level

Words **MICHAEL DONLEVY** Illustration **TILL LUKAT**

Intervals. We're not talking the gap between the peloton, the yellow jersey group and the lunatic solo breakaway rider here – the intervals we're interested in are those training sessions that hurt but make you fitter, faster.

'Intervals are simply a way to break up training sessions into hard and easy periods,' says coach Ric Stern. 'By making the hard work harder and the easy work easier you manipulate the intensity and can put in harder efforts to gain better physiological adaptations. Hard, easy, repeat. Hopefully don't throw up!'

The ideal place to perform intervals is indoors on a trainer, where there are no junctions, potholes or traffic, but outdoors is fine if you can find a suitable stretch of road or loop, either flat or with a long climb. The key is consistency, because it's hard to hold your power output at a constant level if the gradient is constantly changing.

> 'Intervals are almost infinite. They will depend on your fitness level and training goals, but your hard efforts can last anything from 20 seconds to 20 minutes'

'If you can, use a power meter for measuring your efforts,' says Stern. 'If you can't, short efforts of less than a minute can be done using the rate of perceived exertion (RPE) – where 1-2 is very light intensity and 9-10 is your maximum – and longer efforts can be done with a mix of heart rate and RPE. But power is so much more specific for dialling in a range and staying in it.'

It also helps to know your functional threshold power (FTP), which is the maximum pace you can maintain for an hour, because many of the intervals you'll find recommended by coaches rely on training zones dictated by your FTP – for example, endurance sessions take place at 55%-75% of your FTP, threshold work is 95%-105% and the intervals that will improve your VO_2 max and anaerobic capacity take place at 105% and from 120% respectively.

'Interval duration and rep range are almost infinite,' says Stern. 'They will depend on your current fitness level and your training goals, but your hard efforts can last anything from 20 seconds to 20 minutes.'

Greatest HIITs

Shorter, harder efforts fall into a category called high-intensity interval training (HIIT). 'This is most of your training that's above FTP in intensity,' says Stern. 'Obviously the harder you exercise the shorter the duration must be.'

That means HIIT is time-efficient. The intensity raises your metabolic rate and heart rate much higher than steady-state training, so you burn more energy and get fitter faster. But herein lies the danger.

'Too much HIIT can have an adverse effect on performance because it's very tiring,' says Stern. Less is more, so don't do more than one session every week or two until you're fit enough to handle it.

Examples? Stern suggests four-minute intervals at just above FTP pace with three to four-minute rest periods in between, or 30 seconds on/30 seconds off with the 'on' starting at your maximum sprint pace.

'Split these into sets of three, with five to 10 minutes easy in between sets to maintain quality,' he says. 'These 30-second lung-busters are great for building sprint power, but like all intervals will help build FTP too.'

At the other end of the scale are threshold tolerance intervals (TTIs), which break FTP sessions into chunks. 'You can do two 20-minute sessions at just below FTP with a few minutes easy in between, or you can do shorter efforts such as eight five-minute intervals at between 95% and 105% of FTP with somewhere between one and five-minute recovery periods,' says Stern. 'These can be done regularly and are particularly useful if time-trials are your thing because they increase your ability to ride for a long time at a set speed.'

Intervals can also be used to get you primed for action. 'A race pace interval lasts two or three minutes at the same intensity as the shorter TTI efforts, with one minute recovery,' says Stern. 'Do three of them to "open" your legs and lungs as part of your race warm-up or to lead into a longer training session.'

Structured approach

While the possibilities are endless, it's worth having some sort of structure so you can measure progress. 'The fitter you become, the harder it is to keep getting fitter,' says Stern. They also need to be specific and efficient.

'A time-trialler will have different goals and needs to a road racer. The time you have available is also a big factor, because if you have 25 hours a week to train, most of those hours will have to be low intensity, while if you have six hours a week your training will have to be really intense.'

The crucial balance between volume and intensity will be governed by other factors including your age, fitness and health status as you look to progress. 'It will also vary depending on the time of year,' adds Stern. 'In the off-season you'll want to increase volume to build base fitness, whereas in the race season or summer you might focus on increasing intensity. Although if you've got a race coming up you might not want to increase either, on the basis that it's better to be slightly undercooked than on your knees.'

How you integrate interval sessions into your training regime may require a degree of trial and error. 'Some riders like to do intervals after a day off, when they feel fresh, while others perform better when they do a session the day before,' says Stern. 'If you're still able to do intervals in a "tired" state towards the end of the week, when your muscle glycogen is slightly depleted, they can lead to greater fitness adaptations in the muscles.'

Don't go all in, all of the time, though. Steady endurance work should form the bulk of your training, and you also need rest days, which allow your body to recover from the hard efforts you've put it through and to restore its muscle and liver glycogen – the body's carbohydrate stores.

'As you get fitter you can up the interval sessions from once every 10 days to once every seven days, and potentially up to twice per week,' says Stern. 'But don't do two per week unless you're a strong rider and even then don't do them for more than a few weeks at a time because you'll plateau and you won't get the full benefits.

'It's also important to freshen up from a mental perspective. Rest days needn't be a complete day off the bike, and could include short and easy spins, but proper rest means you'll come back to your harder sessions with more energy and higher intensity.'

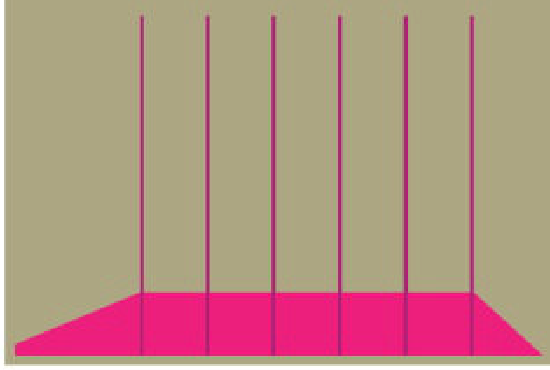
Action plan

Four interval training sessions in detail

Sprinting power intervals

Aim: To improve max speed and power output

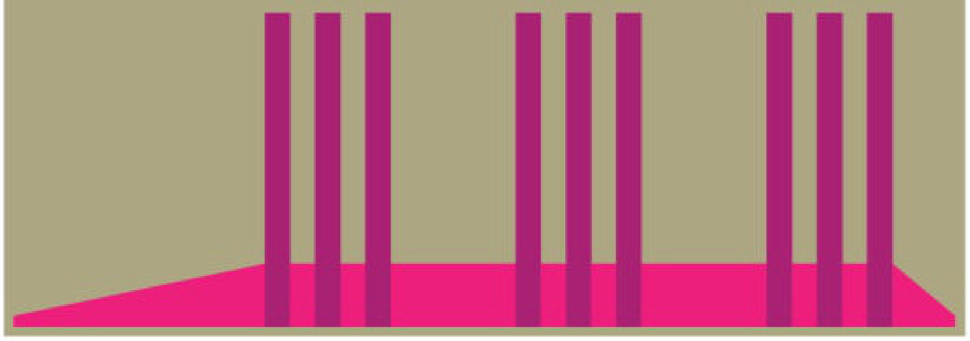
10min warm-up; 6x 15sec sprints at max effort; 5min rest between each; 5min cool down. **Total 41.5min**



HIIT intervals

Aim: To improve VO_2 max, aerobic power and FTP

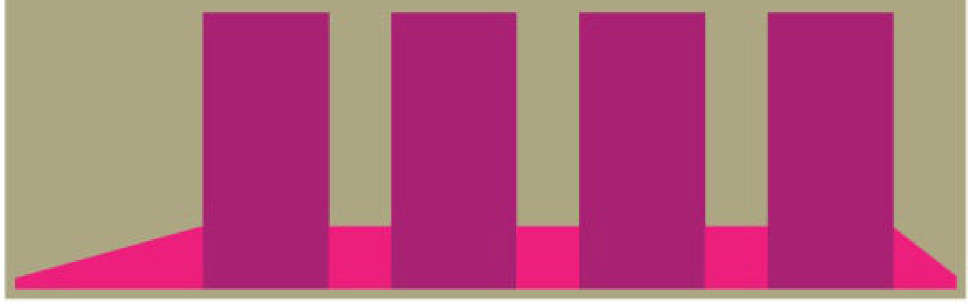
20min warm-up; 3x 2min at 120% of FTP, 2min between each; 3 sets with 10min between; 5min cool down. **Total 75min**



Threshold tolerance intervals

Aim: To increase FTP, lactate threshold and speed endurance

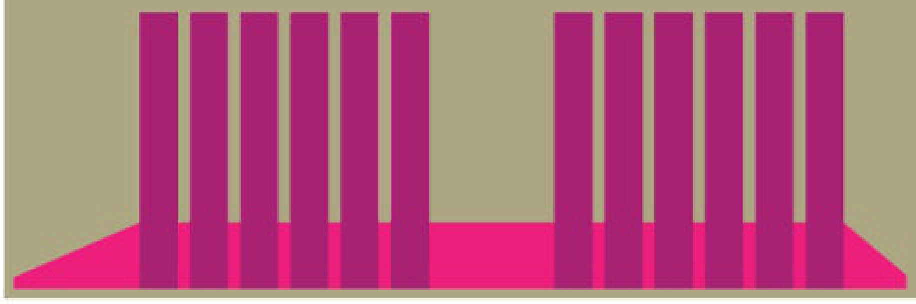
15min warm-up; 4x 10min at 105% of FTP; 5min rest between each; 5min cool down. **Total 75min**



Race pace intervals

Aim: To prime you for peak performance ahead of a race or hard session, or act as a slightly easier TTI session

10min warm-up; 6x 3min at 95-105% of FTP, 1min between each; 2 sets with 10min rest between; 5min cool down. **Total 71min**



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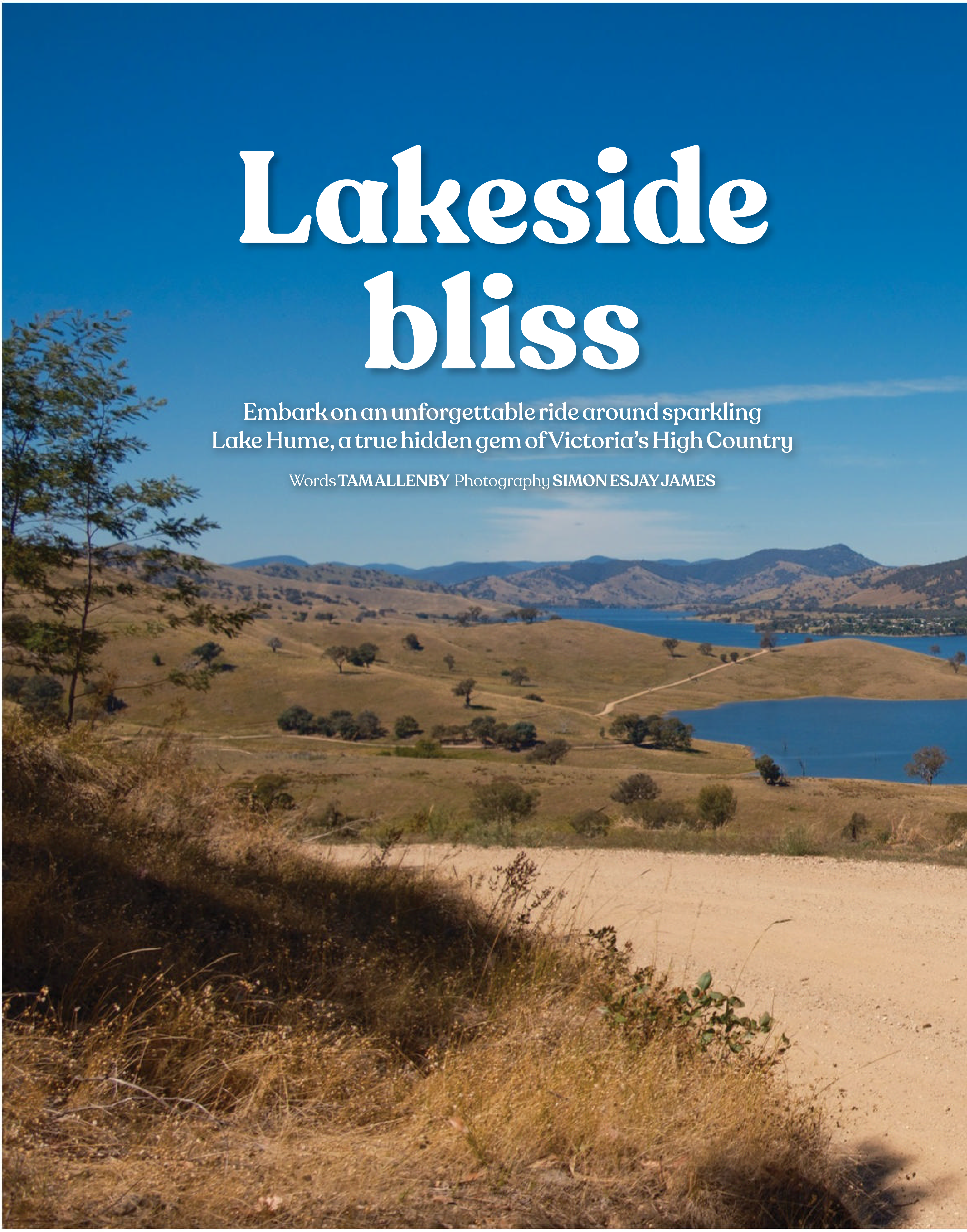
Lakeside bliss

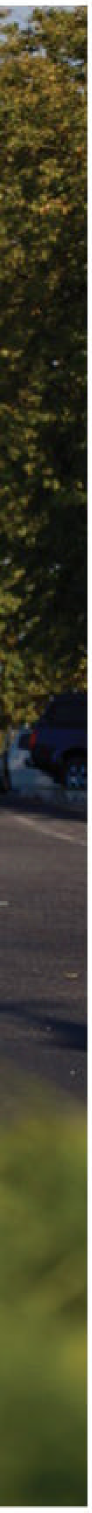


Embark on an unforgettable ride around sparkling Lake Hume, a true hidden gem of Victoria's High Country

Words **TAM ALLENBY** Photography **SIMON ESJAY JAMES**

Above: The team rolls out of Tallangatta fuelled and ready for the loop around Lake Hume

Right and opposite: The scenery in this part of the world can switch from open hillside plains to dense bush – and that's without even mentioning the water views still to come



We're hundreds of kilometres from the ocean somewhere in regional Victoria, but it almost feels like we're two-wheeled explorers, circumnavigating an island on an inland sea.

And in a way, we are. Lake Hume – a man-made reservoir across the Murray River near Albury-Wodonga – is estimated to hold around six times the volume of water in Sydney Harbour; after two-and-a-half La Niñas, it might even be more than that. All along our route, the water level rises above the fencelines of old paddocks, and with an extra metre or so, would threaten to submerge a few bridges we either cross or pass by. Water, water everywhere, indeed.

Cruising down another tarmac roller just over halfway through the ride – farmland to my left, watery expanse to my right – I catch back onto the group of three in front of me, who had slipped away while I was distracted by the spectacular view. We've got around 50 kays and a gravel sector left on the agenda, and fuelled by a charcuterie board, gooey baked brie and a splash of Prosecco at our mid-ride winery stop, things couldn't be much better.

Explorers maybe, but well-fed ones. It's a hard life sometimes.

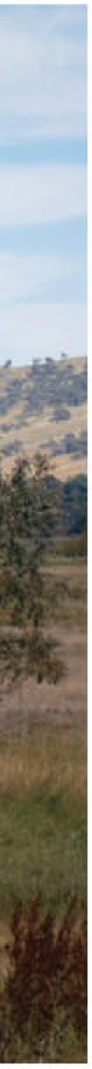
Language lessons

It's seven degrees and right now I wish I was back in the hot tub.

A summer of humid Sydney riding has left me ill-equipped to deal with a chilly mid-March morning on the fringes of Victoria's High Country. Sans gloves or leg warmers, it's a crisp 5km spin from the Good House – last night's luxury accommodation and the home of the aforementioned hot tub (wood fired, I might add) – to the town of Tallangatta, where our group of four stops in at a cafe to fuel up for the day's adventures: nearly 120 mostly flat, mostly sealed kays along the shore of Lake Hume in spectacular Towong Shire.

Garry, cyclocross racer and one of our companions for today's ride, had only minutes before made short work of the sketchy gravel driveway down from our luxury digs to the rail

We fuel up for the day's adventures: nearly 120 mostly flat, mostly sealed kays along the shore of Lake Hume



GRANYA
Pure Pioneering History

Tallangatta, a settlement of around 1,100 people, is an architectural gem and is one of two 'Notable Towns' in the state, as declared by the National Trust of Australia's Victorian Branch

Left: Welcome to Granya, a peaceful little settlement on the shores of Lake Hume and adjacent to Mount Granya State Park

Below: Sandy Creek Bridge lies on the High Country Rail Trail a few kays before the official start of our route at the Good House, but we couldn't resist a quick stop to enjoy its unique architecture

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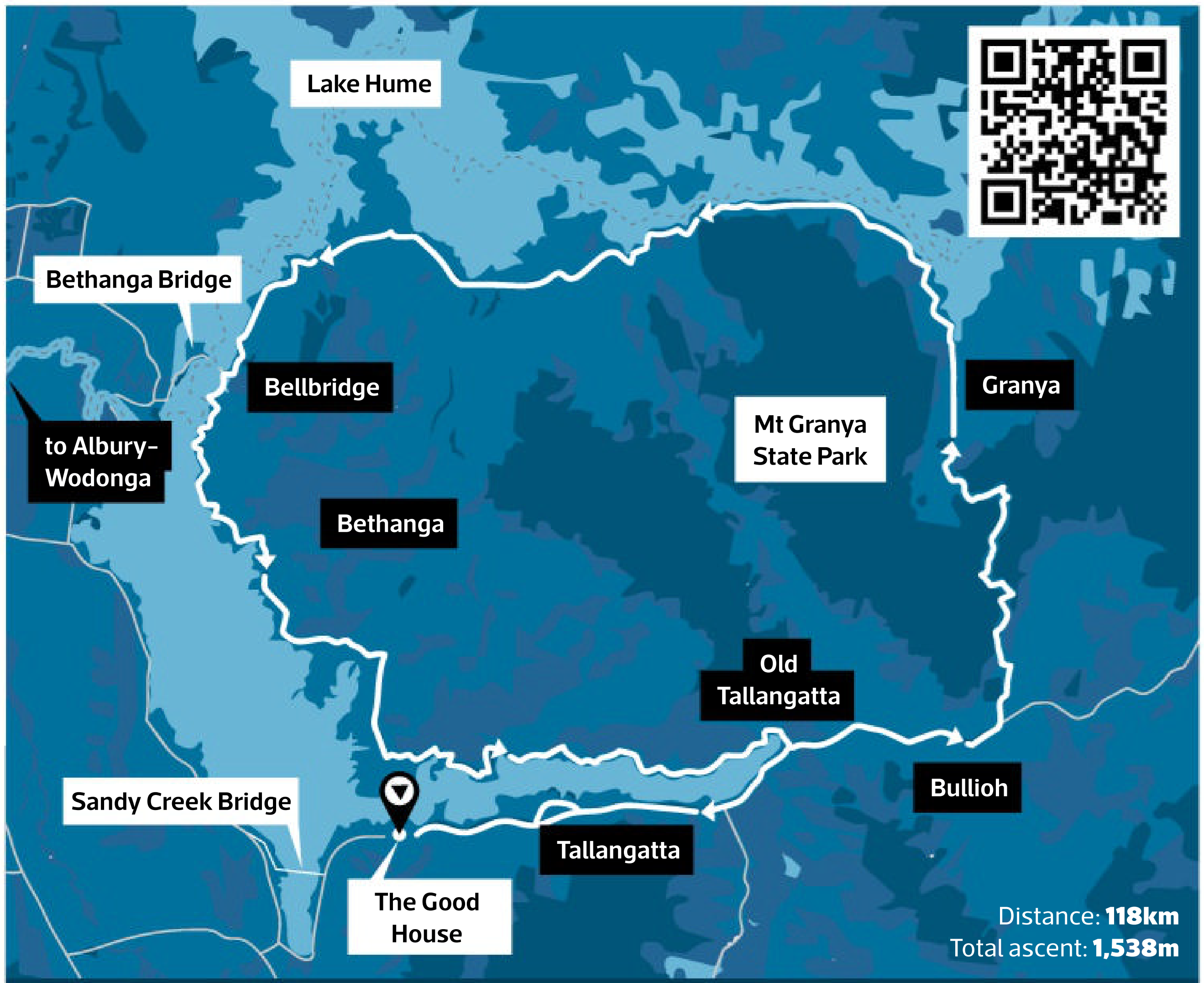
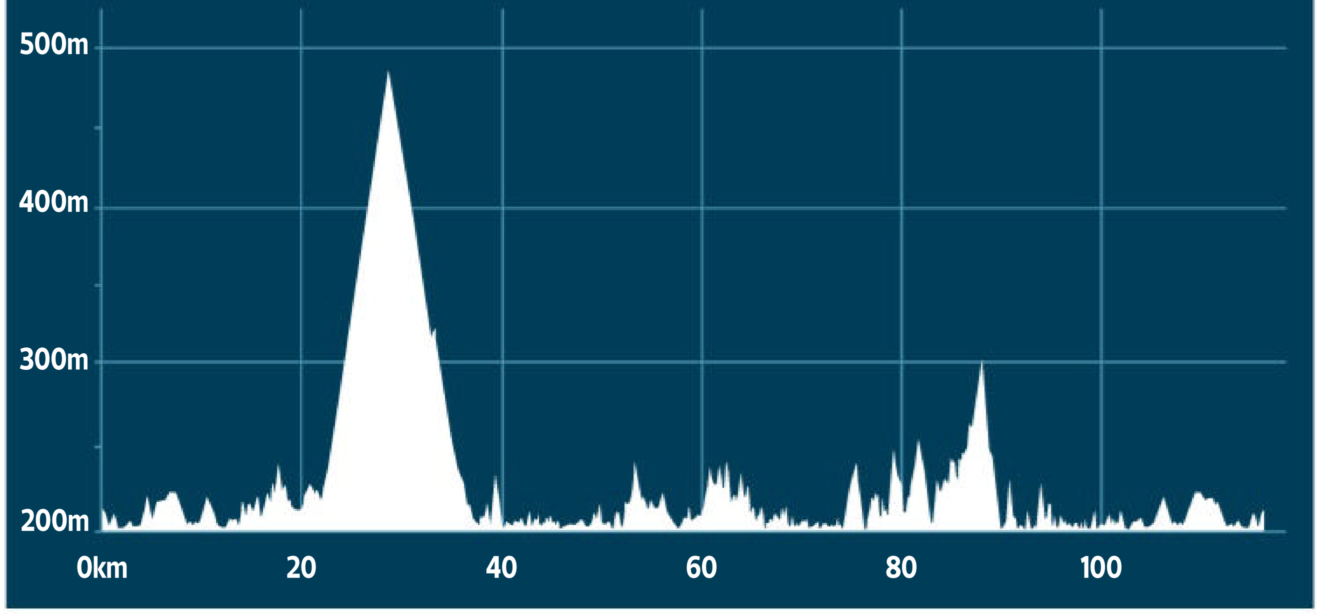


Distance: **118km**
Total ascent: **1,538m**

The route we took

Starting at the Good House (don't worry if you're not staying there – the directions are the same from Tallangatta), join the High Countey Rail Trail and pedal 5km into town. We stopped off for coffee and breakfast, but if you're already fuelled, it's still worth looping through the sleepy streets to admire the architecture. Back on the rail trail, you'll soon cross the Mitta Mitta River; just over a kay after that, jump on the main road (Murray Valley Highway) and ride 7km to Bullioh, where you'll turn left onto Granya Road. Enjoy the climb and a sweeping descent into the small town of Granya, and passing through it, bear left on Murray River Road at kilometre 38.

Murray River Road takes you along the northern section of Lake Hume, over rolling climbs and into the town of Bellbridge; but be sure to turn left before you hit Bethanga Bridge, onto Lake Road. A lunch stop at Websters Estate (kilometre 74) is optional but highly recommended. Lake Road takes you over a few short and steep climbs, and becomes dirt at around the 87km mark for a short section of loose gravel fun. Gripping the edge of Lake Hume, with views back over Tallangatta, cross the bridge at Old Tallangatta and make your way back to towards town. If you have time, continue on and check out the architecturally impressive Sandy Creek Bridge.



By the numbers

A few Hume numerals

319

Elevation gain in metres on the Mount Granya road climb. It's not massive, nor particularly steep, but it's definitely the most significant challenge of the day.

40

Agreed-upon ideal temperature (in degrees celsius) to enjoy the wood-fired spa at the Good House. Esjay was somehow able to tolerate 45°C, but he's special.

7.5

Length in kilometres of the gravel sector on Lake Road. Potentially the most scenic section of the loop, you'll need to keep your wits about you as the road can get pretty rough (for a road bike anyway).

3

Wines tasted in the sunshine at Websters Estate. Our pick was the Prosecco.

2

Flat tyres for our quartet, and all in the first 20 kays of the ride; first to Garry, and then to Esjay. Unless you're packing 30mm+ of rubber, we recommend jumping off the High Country Rail Trail and onto the road after crossing the Mitta Mitta River.

The town was relocated 8km west when the Lake Hume reservoir expanded and the old town was flooded. It's like riding around a mid-century time capsule

Left: Rolling along the northern section of the loop just a stone's throw from the Victoria–NSW border

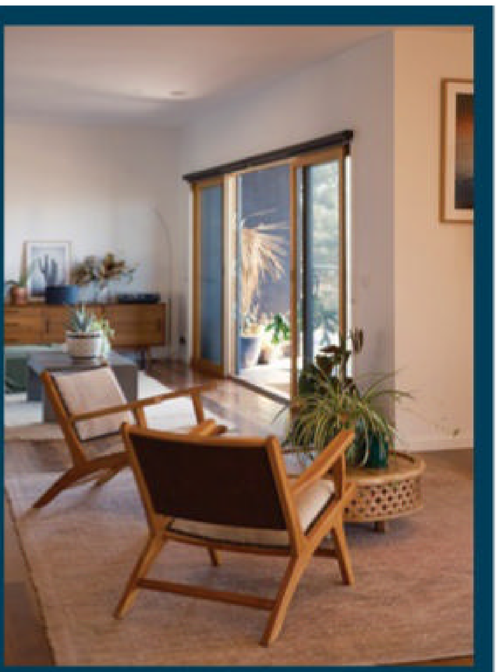
trail that leads us into town; his wife, training buddy and the brains behind the route today, Fiona – also a high level CX and MTBer – had similarly shown me a clean set of wheels on the loose descent. Evidently, Esjay and I are in good hands, and we chat over flat whites and toasties as the mercury outside rises to something more tolerable for fragile Sydneysiders like us.

Pronounced with emphasis on the second syllable (tah-LANG-ga-tah, and not ta-lan-GAT-ah, as Fiona and Garry inform us), the settlement of around 1,100 people is an architectural gem. One of two 'Notable Towns' in the state – as declared by the National Trust of Australia's Victorian branch – its history explains its modernist charm: back in the 1950s, the entire town was relocated 8km to the west when the Lake Hume reservoir was expanded and the old town was flooded. It's like riding around a mid-century time capsule.

We basically have to force Esjay out of Tallangatta, who, if we didn't have 115km in front of us, would happily have spent the morning snapping pictures of the town's wide boulevardes and various retro shopfronts. I can hardly blame him – the chilly dawn has bloomed into a beautiful, golden morning.

Let's get to work

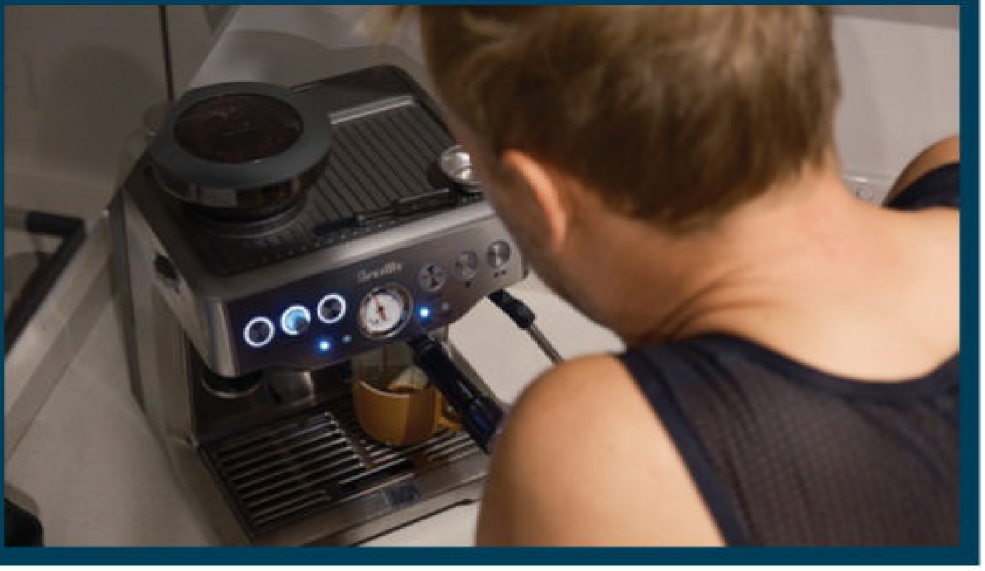
Back on the rail trail, the wind has picked up slightly, but the temperature is much more agreeable, and its gentle gradients are the perfect warm-up. Crossing a bridge over the Mitta Mitta River (the water is so high that you wouldn't be able to fit so much as a dinghy underneath its



The Good House

While there are a few places to stay in Tallangatta (i.e. the pubs or a motel) we highly, highly recommend taking a leaf out of our book and staying at the Good House (bit.ly/3MezocW), only a 5-10 minute drive (or a 20-minute pedal) from town.

Located on top of a big hill, with sweeping views over the lake and surrounding countryside, the Good House is brand new, with four bedrooms (featuring possibly the comfiest pillows of all time), modern fittings, a sun-kissed balcony, fully equipped kitchen (complete with espresso machine!), multiple firepits and fireplaces, and – best of all – a wood-fired hot tub. Simply turn on the tap on, light a fire, and then return an hour or so later for a well-earned soak. Now that's living.



expanse), the surface turns to chunky, coarse gravel, and within minutes Garry has a flat. Repaired and rolling again – and leaving the lake behind – it's only a few hundred metres until Esjay is rim bashing as well, and after some hasty repairs we elect to jump back on the road at the turn-off to old Tallangatta, our 28mm road tyres clearly no match for the flinty gravel.

While we miss out on around five kays of off-piste rail trail cruising, being on the road allows us to pick up a bit more speed, and we smash through the small settlement of Bullioh before turning onto quiet and leafy Granya Road, where the road begins to rise. Flicking through screens on my Wahoo, it's clear we're onto the main climb of the day, the elevation graph spiking just like my heart rate as Garry ups the pace.

In the end, and despite this early acceleration, Mount Granya turns out to be a super enjoyable climb, the gradient never going much above 5% over the course of its smooth, 7km length. We tap up it together, enjoying the morning light streaming through the gum trees, all agreeing it would be a great hill on which to do efforts. A look at Strava later reveals the KOM time is just over 15 minutes, though we aren't anywhere near that pace this morning.

Stopping at the top, we take the opportunity to peel off a couple of layers and chew down a bar each; by now it's nearly 20 degrees, and forecast to increase over the course of the day.

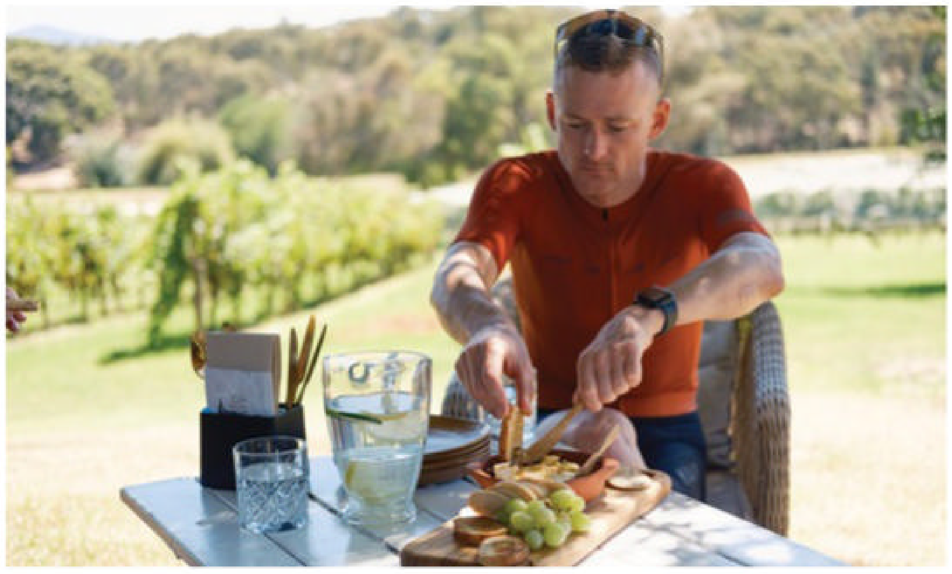
Borderlands

The descent off Mount Granya is a good one. The road seems to be slightly steeper on this side of the hill, and we carve through the smooth, perfectly cambered corners, jumping back on the pedals over small rises and flatter sections. 'So much fun!' I hear Esjay yell as he bombs past me, pushing ahead on the tarmac rollercoaster to get a photo.

Towards the bottom of the descent, the trees open up and we're treated to a view across the pastoral valley to the northern reaches of the lake, and after passing through sleepy Granya

Right: Lycra meets luxe at Websters Estate, a boutique family-run winery in the lakeside village of Bethanga

I ask High Country local Garry for his thoughts on the ride. 'It's waterfront bliss over here,' he grins



(the town named after the mountain, or maybe the other way around), we're soon on its shores once again. I ask High Country local Garry for his thoughts on the ride at this point. 'It's waterfront bliss over here,' he grins.

'Round here we're traversing along the water line, we've gone up and over a climb, whereas back home we've only got valley roads or straight out-and-back up a hill. The Ovens [River] ain't as spectacular as Lake Hume!' Hyperbole maybe – the riding around Bright, where he and Fiona live, is world-class – but it's safe to say we're all very impressed with the loop so far as we pass the 50km mark. Now heading west, we pick up a tailwind and make short work of a few rollers, and while the pace stays conversational, I think to myself that it would be a great road for a chop off.

After a brief stop at a lookout over the lake – with the NSW/VIC border, and therefore the original course of the Murray, submerged somewhere in front of us – it's not long until we're in the small lakeside town of Bellbridge. We roll past the Bethanga Bridge (which, like the one over the Mitta Mitta River earlier in the morning, is barely above the waterline) and enjoy a lovely section of road right on the edge of the water, admiring a few vintage speedboats that are out enjoying the absolute-pearler conditions.

Any warmer and it'd be worth stopping for a swim, but we also have a lunch booking at a winery to make; it's bang on 12:30 as we turn left up the smooth gravel driveway to Websters Estate.

Fuel or feast?

We find a shady spot for the bikes and within minutes we're enjoying a tasting glass of Prosecco, soaking in the sunshine and a lovely view over the vines. The winery's owner, Jo, is soon out with our lunch for the day, and to be honest I'm surprised she can even carry what has to be the largest charcuterie and cheese board any of us have ever seen: it's gargantuan, and more importantly, delicious. Not bad as far as mid-ride park-ups go, that's for sure.

In the end, the mountains of dairy and cured meats are no match for four hungry cyclists, and we polish most of it off before forcing ourselves back onto the bikes, bidding adieu to Jo and making sure we're rolling again before the prospect of a nap in the sun becomes too tempting.

It's impossible to outride a calorie bomb like that so we're all feeling pretty sluggish on the first couple of hills after the winery, our energy sapped by digesting the feast in our stomachs rather than the pressure we're putting on the pedals. Apart from the Mount Granya climb, these feel like the most significant uphill sections of the day; luckily, we're distracted by the view, which stretches south over a deeper section of the lake and onwards to the mountains proper.

Eighty-six kilometres in and mostly recovered from our feast, tarmac changes to gravel, the loose surface snapping me out of

my post-lunch slumber. Going up, it's pretty smooth and very much manageable on the road bikes; the descent a couple of kays later is a little sketchier, but apart from an ejected bottle and a few skids in the rutted and washed-out corners, the four of us make it through the gravel sector without incident. It also happens to be probably the most picturesque part of the ride so far, the hilly gravel roads and verdant hillside making me feel a bit like Tom Pidcock (minus the skills) after his victory at Strade Bianche only a couple of weeks prior. Tuscany and Towong – what's the difference?

Fertile grounds

Gravel dealt with, the road now snakes even more closely along the edge of the lake. It has narrowed significantly at this section, and we can easily see across to Tallangatta, our loop nearly complete. To our left, it's all rugged, steep hillside; to our right, dead, submerged trees cast their reflections over the water's surface. The start of the ride was nice, but the best views, and perhaps the most challenging part of the parcours, have both definitely come after lunch.

Around 5km later we make it to Old Tallangatta, which I'm surprised to find still exists; once upon a time, the older houses we roll past would've been up on the hill above town. These days, the majority of it is

'The scenery here is pretty different to other parts of the High Country and you're not going to come across a lot of other people. It's just a super place to ride'

Right: Good House, good views – our Big Ride accommodation offers a spectacular vista over Lake Hume and the hills of Bethanga beyond

Above right: The team treat themselves to a post-ride soak in the wood-fired hot tub

How we did it

TRAVEL
Tallangatta is located around six hours from Sydney and just over four hours from Melbourne on the shores of Lake Hume. Driving is by far the easiest way to get there, though the nearest major town of Albury-Wodonga does have an airport, so flying from Melbourne or Sydney (and renting a car) would also be an option. Your best bet would be to make a trip of it and stop off for a night or two at the Good House before moving onwards to the more established riding towns of Bright or Beechworth for a High Country extravaganza.

FOOD
There are a couple of pubs in Tallangatta, but our pick was the Victoria Hotel for night-before fuelling; we recommend the scotch fillet, but the schnitzels also looked solid. For the chefs among you, there are also great cooking facilities at the Good House. Pre-ride coffees and toasties were handled by the hospitable team at Sixtyfour Degrees on the main street of town, while our next-level mid-ride park-up at the family-owned Websters Estate – complete with wine tasting and massive cheese and charcuterie board – was a genuine highlight of the trip.

THANKS
A huge thanks must go to the incredible team at Ride High Country, who made this trip an absolute breeze. A special mention also to our riding buddies for the day Fiona and Garry; Fiona, thanks for putting together such a great loop – loved it! We'll definitely be back.

underwater, and I later discover that as recently as 2007 – when Australia was in the grips of a severe drought, and Lake Hume reached as low as 1% capacity – the foundations of the buildings, their actual structures long since washed away, were clearly visible. While this would certainly make for an interesting sight, it's pretty clear current water levels are preferable for all involved – no matter whether you're a farmer or a cyclist.

Back on the rail trail and over the bridge across the Mitta Mitta River, we put our heads down for the remaining 13 kays to the Good House, where a cold beer, a shower and an afternoon soak in the hot tub await. The final challenge of the day is the steep gravel pinch up to our luxury digs, which saps any remaining energy from the legs and leaves us puffing as we wheel the bikes onto the massive lakefront balcony. Did I mention the view?

Big Ride conquered, I ask Esjay and Fiona for their final thoughts on the loop, and unprompted, both use the term 'hidden gem'. I have to agree. Not knowing a lot about the area coming in, the ride has exceeded my expectations, and it really does feel like we've done a lap of a remote, landlocked island. Also, while I'm not completely spent, the ride has been more leg-sapping than it first appeared – although our mid-ride feast may have also been a factor in the perceived difficulty after lunch. Not that I'm complaining.

'Not many people ride here,' Fiona says. 'The scenery is pretty different to other parts of the High Country, and you're not going to come across a lot of others, whether that's cars or other riders.

'It's just a super place to ride.' You heard it here first, folks.

Tam Allenby is a cycling writer who is confident he couldn't have carried that charcuterie board

Shark Tale

Vincenzo Nibali's retirement last year meant bidding farewell to one of professional cycling's most versatile and enterprising racers. The Italian legend goes on a deep dive of his career, the state of the modern sport and what's next for him

Words **ANDY McGRATH**
Photography **DAVID ROTA**

‘I’ve always thought that the hardest thing is not winning, it’s doing it again,’ says Vincenzo Nibali. As he talks about the void left in Italian stage racing by his retirement, he inadvertently strikes upon a key part of what made him so special: ‘It’s hard because everyone knows you’re strong so you get marked. You think the same preparation might be right again, but it never is, so you have to come up with something new.

‘It’s like in Formula 1 – the engine is different every year and preparation changes too. If you do training that works one year and repeat it, it won’t go as well because your body remembers it. You have to change it to get the best out of it.’

Nibali was a master of this art of re-invention, getting more out of himself year in, year out. The result was four Grand Tour wins and three Monuments, with a podium finish in at least one of them every year from 2009 to 2019. He was a *Boy’s Own* cyclist with a knack for the spectacular, whether carving down descents with laser precision, racing from the front on the muddy cobbles of northern France or shining bright through the snow in the Dolomites.

There is no more repetition needed now. We meet a few months into his retirement – if you can call it that, because Nibali has hardly stopped. A week after bowing out at Il Lombardia in October 2022, he jumped on a mountain bike and raced for fun – he has loved off-road since childhood, but it was practically forbidden during his career. He has done a photo shoot on Mount Etna for Italian clothing brand Q36.5 and has been advising its new pro team as a consultant. Then there have been trips to South Africa, Singapore and Japan to ride or race criteriums. As we chat in a Spanish training camp hotel, he reflects that he hasn’t had a holiday.

‘My career ended, but I didn’t have a chance to go, “Damn, it’s over, what shall I do now?”’

Born attacker

Nibali started at the bottom, quite literally. You can’t get much further south in Italy than the island of Sicily, a loose nail off the country’s boot. Having started racing at the age of nine, he was already putting in the kilometres at a young age. His father Salvatore would drive north to Puglia and Campania on the mainland, long nights spent in the car and on the ferry. A former amateur racer, Salvatore fettled with his son’s bikes and passed on his passion. The young Vincenzo had posters of Marco Pantani on his bedroom wall and devoured VHS tapes (his parents owned a rental store) of Francesco Moser.

There’s a wistful-sounding Sicilian proverb: *cu nesci, arrinesci* – who leaves, succeeds. To have a chance of emulating his heroes, Nibali had to spread his wings. At the age of 15 he moved to Tuscany, living in a house with teammates from his GS Mastromarco amateur team.

‘I was afraid because I was changing my school, my whole environment. You leave your friends behind. But the desire to test myself and race further afield was immense. It was stronger than the fear. Many times we see that fire

Italian icon

The life and climbs of Vincenzo Nibali

2006
Joins Liquigas in his second year as a pro and wins his first races, a stage of Settimana Coppi e Bartali and the GP Plouay.

2009
Finishes sixth on his Tour de France debut.

2010
Vuelta a España victory is the pick of the lot. Wins his first Giro stage, soloing away down Monte Grappa on the way to third overall.

2012
Takes a second Tirreno-Adriatico title; gets pipped by Maxim Iglinskiy to Liège-Bastogne-Liège; finishes third at the Tour de France.

2013
Joins Astana. Caps Giro win by taking victory in the falling snow on Tre Cime di Lavaredo. Chris Horner pips him to Vuelta victory by 37 seconds.

2014
A dominant Tour de France with four stage wins and the biggest winning margin of the 21st century; wins Italian road race title.

2015
Takes a second Italian road race title and a Tour de France stage on the way to fourth; wins Il Lombardia.

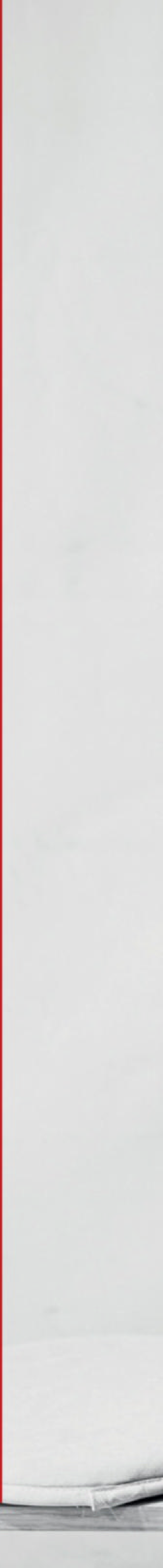
2016
Has an unlikely come-from-behind Giro d’Italia triumph. Crashes downhill when fighting for a medal at the 2016 Olympic road race.

2017
Signs for Bahrain-Merida. Takes his seventh and final Giro stage on the way to third place. Finishes second at the Vuelta and wins Il Lombardia.

2018
Wins Milan-San Remo in swashbuckling fashion. Thibaut Pinot bests him in Il Lombardia, while he quits the Tour after crashing.

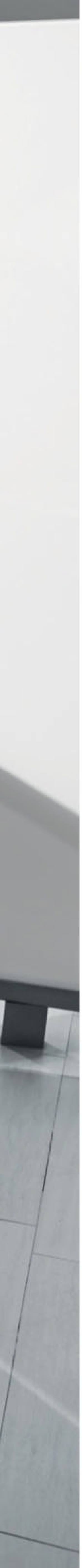
2019
Underestimates Richard Carapaz and finishes as Giro runner-up. Takes an impressive Tour stage win on the penultimate day.

2021
Takes victory in his backyard at the Tour of Sicily, the 52nd and final win of his career.



Q36.5 PRO
CYCLING
TEAM
Q36.5

> ‘It’s hard because everyone knows you’re strong so you get marked. You think the same preparation might be right again, but it never is’



in kids from small towns or from difficult backgrounds.'

As a kid from poorer Sicily, which is sometimes looked down upon by those from the more affluent north, Nibali already had a point to prove. His first goal was to pull on the blue jersey of the Italian national team. Attention from selectors was guaranteed thanks to his aggressive tactics.

'I wasn't a fast finisher, so to win I had to attack from far out. A lot of times, teammates would say, "Vincenzo, you messed up. If you'd made the move here, you would have won. You threw away an important race!"' Nibali bangs the table with his fist. 'That's how you learn, eh.'

He still won a fair few races. An Italian junior champion, he turned pro in 2005 at the age of 20 with leading Italian squad Fassa Bortolo.

'I was a raw kid who didn't even know where to start. Many people advised me well,' he says. 'And I knew how to choose well too because, sometimes, making a different call can compromise everything and lead to mistakes.'

Nibali wanted to do the Giro d'Italia with Fassa Bortolo but was told to wait because he was too young. 'Well, take me to the Tour then,' was his cheeky riposte. No chance. He needed a few years to develop. 'That was good because I went from small things, learning the ropes as a worker, before pursuing my own dreams,' he reflects.

Does he think there's enough patience in modern-day cycling? 'No. Everyone wants everything right away. That can be good and bad. Logic follows that if an athlete is strong at 20, it's possible to do 10 years of a career very well, but then they're already finished at 30. But stopping at 30 is not like stopping at 40. You've got all the time then to decide what happens next.'

The young Nibali's turning point was not a particular performance, but an extension of his horizons. Heeding the advice of his friend, double world champion Paolo Bettini, he did two Grand Tours in a year – the 2008 Giro and Tour – to find his limits.

'My motor went into overdrive. I was practically dead, I had to recover a lot from them, but that effort and tiredness stayed in my head. And when I did Grand Tours later, perhaps it was a factor that I'd come along physically.'

Step by step is a phrase Nibali uses several times to describe his development. By the time the 2010 Vuelta a España came around, he was 25 and ready to take on the mantle of absolute leadership, with a little help from a friend and Liquigas teammate.

'I was sending daily text messages to Ivan Basso: "Ivan, what do you think of the race? I'm nervous." It seemed a silly thing, but he said I should do what I've always done and wasn't going wrong much."'

Winning his first Grand Tour was a self-confidence game too.

Reach for the Sky

It could all have been so different. Nibali had an offer from Team Sky in 2009 ahead of their debut season, which he seriously considered. 'I looked to see if I could get out of my contract, paying a penalty, but it wasn't possible,' he says. In the meantime, Team Sky went all in with Bradley Wiggins and the opportunity was gone.

'Maybe it wouldn't have gone so well because everything was very specified, detailed. I grew up in a more familial and traditional cycling,' he says.

He became a thorn in Sky's side instead, beating Rigoberto Urán to take his first Giro d'Italia win in 2013. The ultimate prize followed a year later at the Tour de France. He was in the ascendancy from day two, winning with a perfectly timed solo move into Sheffield. Then there was the stage over the cobblestones into Arenberg, teaming up with Jakob Fuglsang to put two minutes into his rivals.

'I was having fun,' he says, laughing. 'I didn't think I'd have problems because since my childhood I've been confident on gravel and mud on my mountain bike. Perhaps it's a shame that I didn't race Paris-Roubaix, even to just try it. But it's not a big regret. I know it's super-hard.'

While Alberto Contador and Chris Froome abandoned, affected by crashes, Nibali stretched his legs – and lead – winning three mountain stages. His winning margin of 7min 37sec over Jean-Christophe Péraud is the race's biggest of the 21st century.

As outgoing as he could be on the bike, Nibali is a calm introvert off it. Winning the Tour flung him into the spotlight. 'I didn't realise what I'd achieved. Everyone wanted Vincenzo, there were a ton of requests and it was hard to handle. It took some time to digest it. I was recognised pretty much wherever I went.'

When talk turns to his rivals, it's another reminder of his longevity: 'I didn't have a single one in my career. There was Fränk and Andy Schleck, Riccò, Lance, Cadel Evans…' he begins. His two biggest foes were Contador and Froome.

'Nothing against Froome, but I prefer Alberto a lot more, because Alberto could think and race outside the box. He was more similar to me. Froome is more schematic.'

Together, the trio are in an elite group who have won all three Grand Tours, alongside Jacques Anquetil, Felice Gimondi, Eddy Merckx and Bernard Hinault. Some fantasy dinner party, that.

Nibali saved his fourth and most dramatic Grand Tour win till last. At the 2016 Giro d'Italia, Dutch rider Steven Kruijswijk appeared to be cruising to victory until he crashed into a snowbank 48 hours from the finish. Nibali went on the warpath to reverse a four-minute deficit. ▶

'I wasn't a fast finisher, so to win I had to attack from far out. A lot of times, teammates would say, "You messed up!"'

Nibali on...

...his nickname

'It came from a good friend in Sicily when I did the Under-23 World Championships in Verona. He was at the race with this big banner saying "The Shark of the Messina Strait". [News channel] RAI did a piece on TV with the fans and captured it. Ever since then, it's stuck. I like it.'

...learning English

'That period with Trek-Segafredo was important for me; it's a very international team where I learned a lot. The first year, where I was speaking it a bit in interviews was pretty knackering. I'm doing Duolingo – my daughter sometimes asks for my phone to use it.'

...his least favourite climbs

'Alpe di Pampeago and the Marmolada. They're a bit similar – wide, straight roads where there are only hairpins in the last part. You can't take any reference point and your rhythm of pedalling at the start goes most of the way through.'

'My two Giro wins were different. I'd dreamed about the first one [in 2013] since I was a kid. The second was something conquered more with the team. It's thanks to them and their work, because it seemed we had lost it all.'

Esteban Chaves was unseated from the *maglia rosa* on the final mountain stage. Nibali had a habit of saving his best till last. As you'd expect, given his nickname, 'the Shark' was merciless when he smelled blood.

'I've always been an attacker, sometimes making reckless moves,' he says, smiling. 'However, in my later years, I tried to consider where to go for it a lot more.'

His final big win, Milan-San Remo in 2018, encapsulated the very best of Nibali: strength, audacity, creativity, perfect positioning and deft bike handling. He made two stinging accelerations up the Poggio and kept most of his 11-second lead down it. He held off the sprinters by mere metres. Nibali recalls that he held 420 watts for more than 20 minutes.

Descending: he's got it down

There are few more striking sights in cycling than Nibali in full flight on a descent. When *Cyclist* suggests he is one of the sport's best at going downhill, Nibali reacts modestly: 'Among the climbers, I consider myself a good descender. However, there are a lot in the bunch. Perhaps they aren't seen and aren't considered. A few times, I've wound up in the *gruppetto* and to make it inside the time limit, we've done descents all-out. Peter Sagan, for example, knows how to handle a bike adeptly.

> 'Nothing against Froome, but I prefer Contador a lot more, because Alberto could think outside the box. He was more similar to me'

'The key to a good descent is having the right balance of weight to get more grip from the tyres. Not too far forwards or backwards, then knowing how to shift it for a corner,' he says. 'If you're afraid and you stiffen up, the bike has less grip and might go straight rather than turn if you brake hard.'

Even after 18 years as a pro, his passion for his sport is clear as he speaks fast, his hands gesturing to reinforce his technical points. Nibali has never been one for snappy soundbites or charm offensives, but who needs that when he raced with such flair?

Very few modern champions have been so good for so long. Even at the age of 37 in 2022, he finished fourth at the Giro. It's now seven years since his and Italy's last triumph there, the longest drought in the nation's history.

'I retired, I gave so much to cycling and I'm happy with that. There are a lot of promising young Italian riders, but as far as the big stage races go, there's nothing,' he says. 'We need to wait; maybe a few will come along. We're going through a bit of a difficult patch.'

He mentions talents such as Classics rider Davide Ballerini (Soudal-QuickStep), 2022 Giro d'Italia stage winner Stefano Oldani of Alpecin-Deceuninck, and Tour of Flanders winner Alberto Bettiol (EF Education-EasyPost). As Nibali has already established, it's all about turning glimpses of class into consistency: repetition.

On that front, there won't be any quite like Nibali again, bridging the gap between a seemingly bygone heroism and the calculating modern age; between instinct, intelligence and science; between Monuments, Grand Tours and every race in between, regardless of the road surface.

And Nibali, who has made a life out of challenging himself, won't stand still. He is preoccupied with helping to take the new Q36.5 team into the WorldTour. He is learning English, helped by his nine-year-old daughter treating the language app Duolingo as a game. He recently took on the Cape Epic mountain bike race in South Africa with his former teammate Ivan Santaromita. Just for fun, he says. He placed 13th overall.

It seems that you can teach an older shark new tricks, but it's fun to remember the classy ones from the past that made him such a rare beast, too.

Andy McGrath is a freelance writer, former editor of Rouleur *and aficionado of all things Italian*

WARREN BARGUIL
CHRIS FROOME
CALEB EWAN
GUILLAUME MARTIN
4 EKOÏ, PARTNER OF PRO TEAMS IN THE TOUR DE FRANCE
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Furka Pass

The Swiss climb with the Midas touch

Words **MATTHEW LOVERIDGE**
Photography **PATRIK LUNDIN**

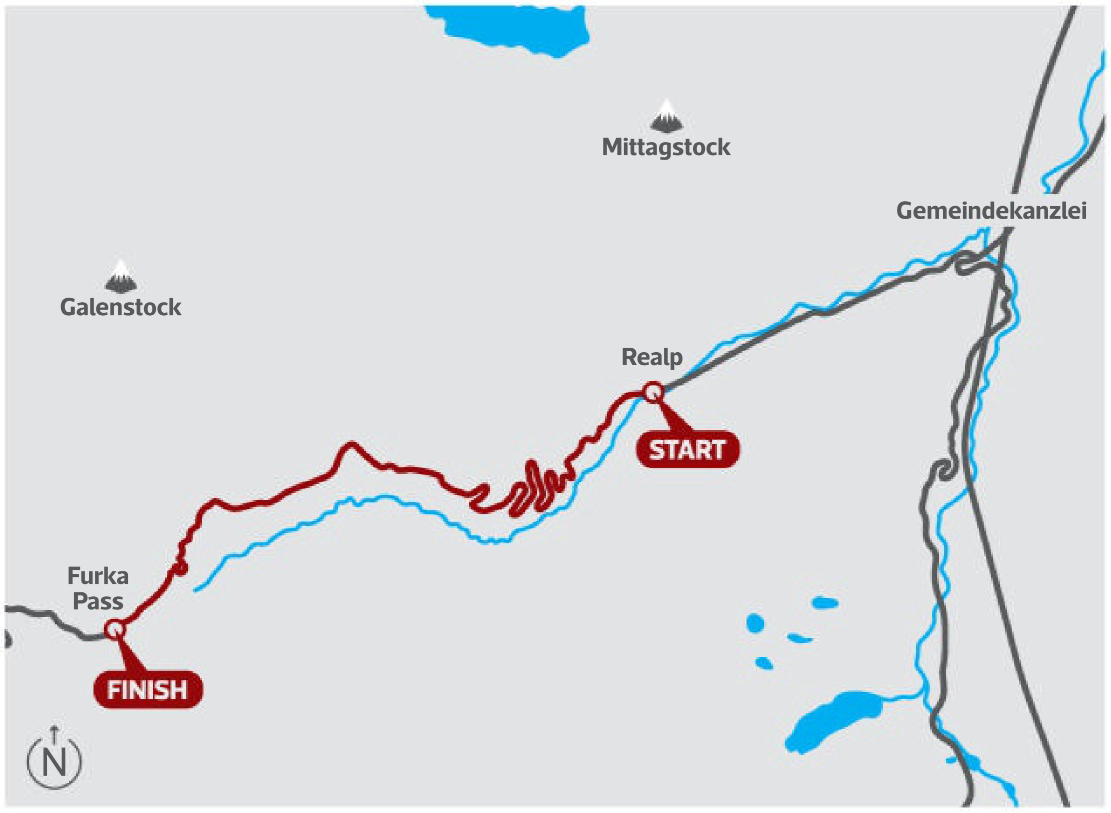
Plangent strings play. A yellow Rolls-Royce Phantom ascends an Alpine road, a hotel perched on a precipice in the background. Down in the valley Bond follows a dot on the screen of his DB5's tracking device, which inexplicably places his quarry somewhere on the outskirts of Geneva. We are nowhere near Geneva.

Some more Rolls, some more jaw-dropping scenery. A Ford Mustang appears. More driving shots. Goldfinger stops for a roadside snack. Tilly Masterson makes a ham-fisted attempt to shoot him with a sniper rifle. Neither he nor Oddjob notices. More driving shots. Bond runs Masterson off the road.

The 1964 classic 007 outing *Goldfinger* is a terrible guide to the Furka Pass for the modern road cyclist. Highly questionable chauvinism aside, the film plays fast and loose with continuity, mixing up sections of the climb with abandon and teleporting its cast of vehicles willy-nilly up and down the pass. Their Strava files must have been a total mess.

ARROW
steigt 890 m
auf 13 km

The map Furka Pass



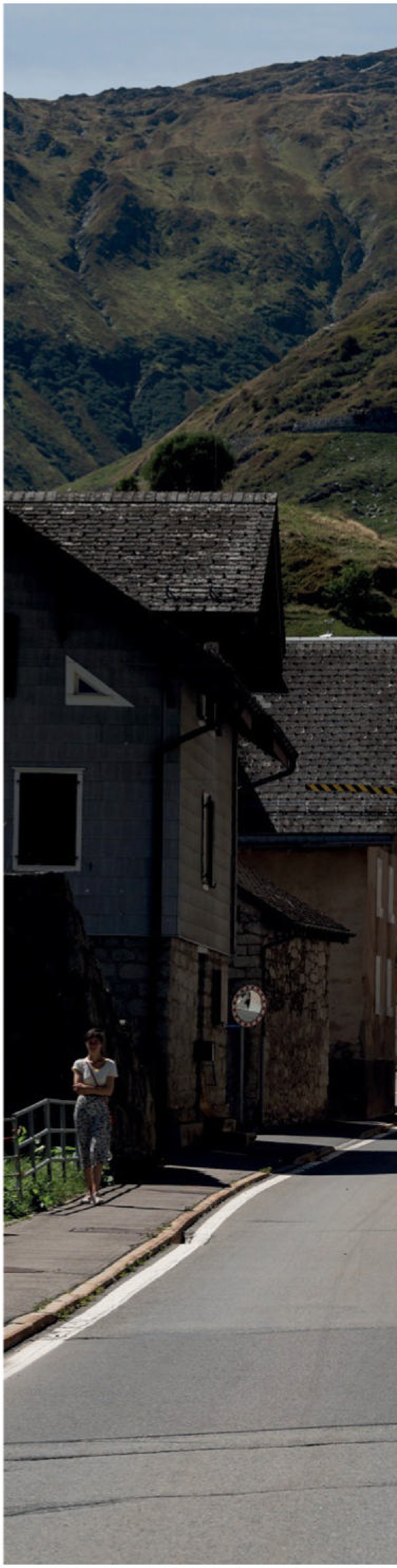
Country Switzerland

Canton Uri

Start Hospental via Realp

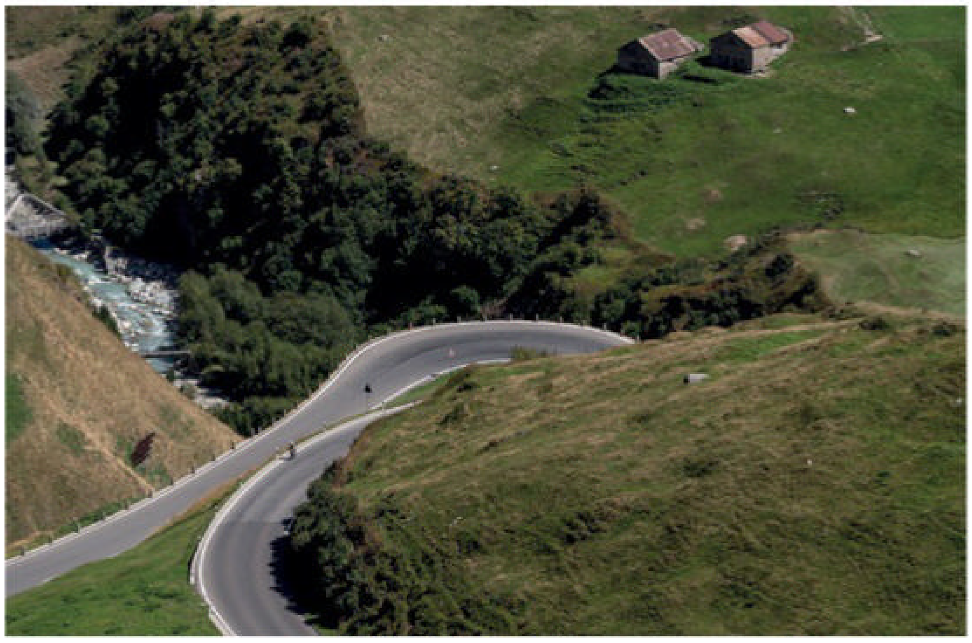
Finish Furka Pass (the top)

Road Furkastrasse / Road 19



HOTEL
POST
PENSION FURKA
100m
ZONE
30

This first section squeezes in almost all of the eastern side of the pass's hairpins in quick succession



Goldfinger is also woefully out of date. Old Auric's Phantom and Tilly's 'stang are subjected to that trendiest of surfaces – gravel – when the current road is in fact made of some of the most perfect tarmac you'll ever ride on.

Roads like these

Without slipping into crass stereotypes, the Swiss are phenomenally good at building roads over, around and through mountains. Theirs is an infrastructure of serenely competent concrete and tarmac. The roads are scrupulously tidy and well thought-out – every avalanche anticipated; every mountain stream directed. Spend some time in Switzerland and you can end up taking the sheer orderliness of everything for granted, but the audacity of roads like the Furka shouldn't be understated.

Soaring 2,436m above sea level, a figure that makes it Switzerland's fourth-highest pass, the Furka links the cantons of Uri and Valais. The road scales some of the most impressive geology Europe has to offer and its elevation means it's typically only open for around five months of

Left: The village of Realp marks the true start of the climb, with its succession of hairpins looming in the background

Above: Imagine yourself to be a DB5 as you toil round the hairpins. Engine noises are optional

Previous pages: It's the lesser-known climb, but the eastern side of the Furka has a grandeur all of its own

The gradient eases for a while, so settle into a rhythm and enjoy it – it's going to take you some time

the year, spending the rest of the time hiding under heavy snow.

When clear, the Furka is a tremendously popular route for all manner of two and four-wheeled vehicles, and for very good reason. Were this a French mountain it would doubtless have a storied racing history, but the Furka somehow keeps a relatively low profile. It does loom periodically over Tour de Suisse stage profiles and it dallied with the Giro d'Italia back in 1965, when the Salvarani team's Vittorio Adorni took Stage 19 over the pass wearing pink and went on to win the GC.

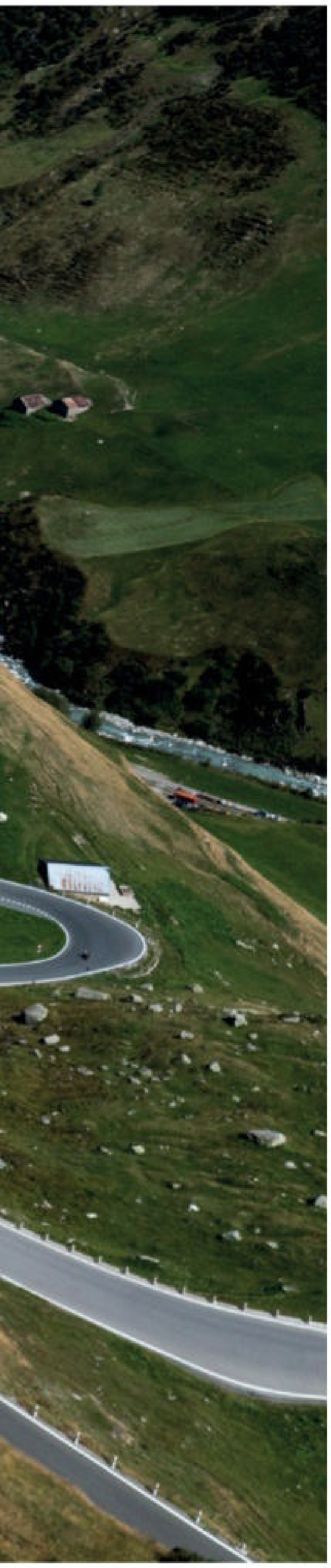
Get your Furk on

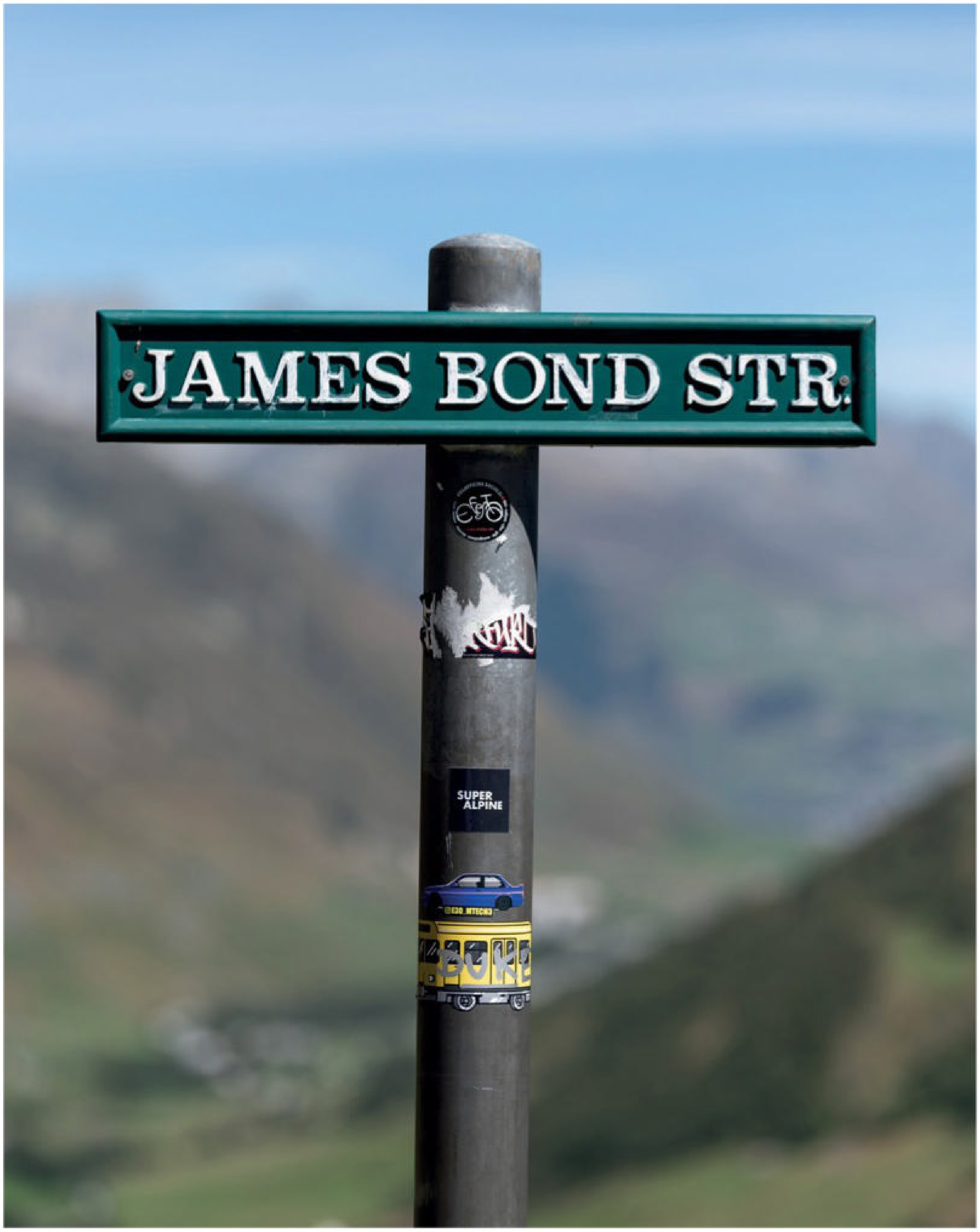
While images of the Furka Pass tend to dwell on the iconic Belle Époque Hotel Belvédère on the western side of the climb – now permanently closed but endlessly Instagrammed for its splendid Wes Anderson-esque frontage – our Furka ride follows in Bond's tyre tracks, a climb to the top from the eastern side of the pass, beginning in the village of Hospental.

We say beginning. It's a long, false flat along the valley with minimal elevation gain and the climb proper arguably gets underway after you emerge from Realp, an Alpine hamlet whose claims to fame include having two train stations and a large golf course.

You are quickly thrust into the steepest part of the climb, but Swiss restraint means you're still only topping out around 11%, the kind of slope where moderately generous road gearing is adequate and it's still feasible to maintain a steady cadence.

This first section squeezes in almost all of the eastern side of the pass's hairpins in quick succession, and you'll be going plenty slow enough to appreciate the ever-broadening

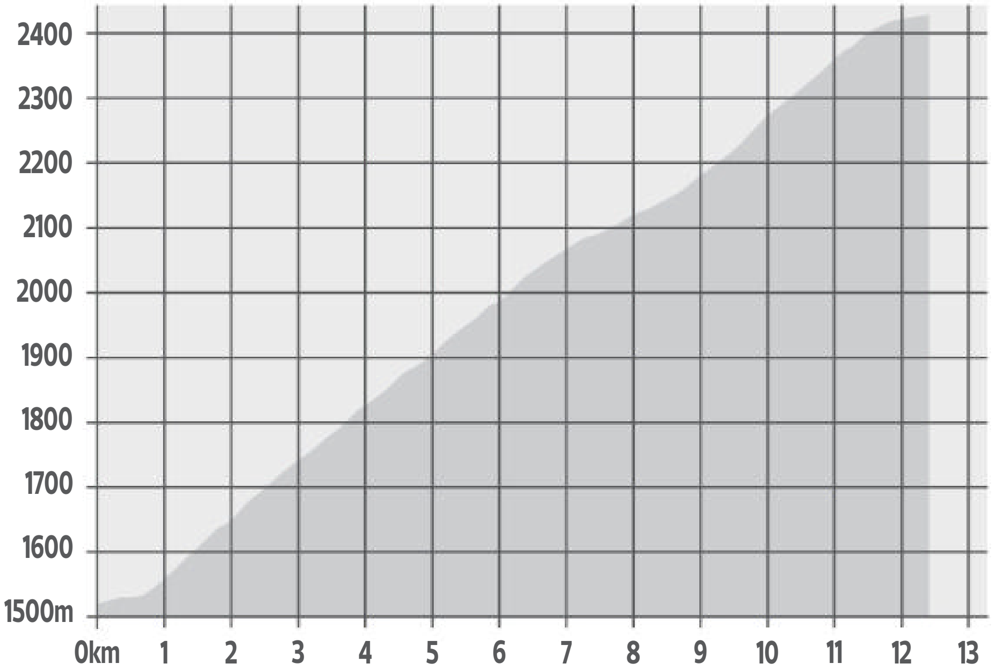




Left: All but two hairpins are despatched in the first section of the climb – it's proper Alpine spaghetti as Realp fades into the distance

Right: RIP Sir Sean. You were a danger to all on the roads

The stats Furka Pass



Distance 12.4km

Summit height 2,436m

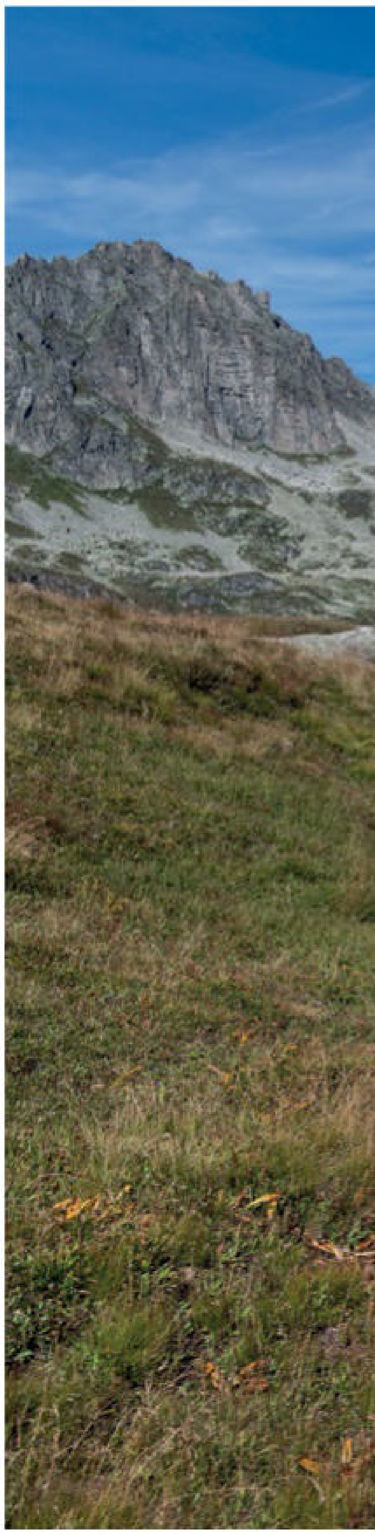
Altitude gain 899m

Average gradient 7.2%

Current best Strava time

KoM Egan Bernal, Colombia (pro) 35:57

QoM Nina Zoller, Switzerland 49:23



views, each reversal delivering a new slice of Alpine splendour. The combination of thin mountain air and constant gradient will certainly get your heart rate up but the return on investment is healthy, as bends come frequently and hoist you up the mountain deceptively quickly.

Double-O-heaven

Swiss restraint is evident once more when after a few twists you reach James Bond Strasse, the precise location where our hero stepped out of the Aston, looked down on Goldfinger's party, and didn't soil himself like a normal person would when he almost got shot in the arse.

Rather than milking it for all its grubby touristic worth, our Swiss friends have gone with a couple of simple signs, leaving the rest up to your imagination. Will you recreate the 'Sean Connery shot'? (Camera, not gun.) That's between you and your dignity, but we can tell you right now it feels pretty silly in Lycra. Not driving-a-Vantage-with-007-themed-plates silly, but definitely cringe-adjacent.

Further hairpin highlights include: an Alpine cheese shop, a pair of 1:1 scale plastic cows and the delightful symmetry of the final switchback that wraps around another shuttered hotel, overlooking an extraordinary craggy tableau.

From here the character of the climb changes and you're working your way along as much as up, the mountain on your right and the endlessly huge view across the valley on your left.

> You can see virtually to the top, which depending on your frame of mind is either inspiring or soul-destroying

Geological pace

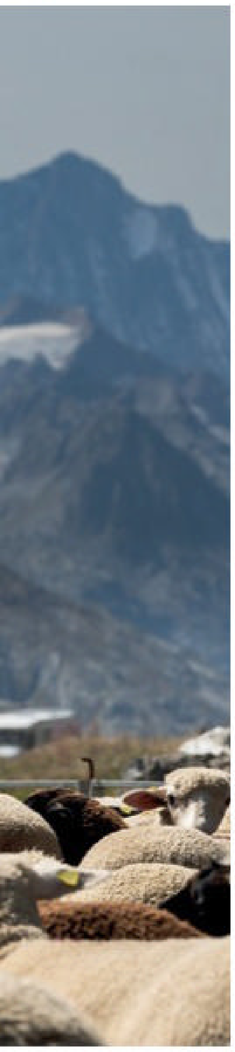
For much of the remainder of your ascent you can see virtually the entire route to the top, which depending on your frame of mind is either inspiring or soul-destroying, because the sheer scale of it inevitably makes your progress seem, appropriately enough, glacial.

The gradient eases for a while though, so settle into a rhythm and enjoy it – it's going to take you some time. Breathe the clear mountain air, feel the cool spray as you pass the Sidelenbach waterfall and think about how much rösti you're going to eat for lunch.

A last mini-test comes in the form of a pair of hairpins before the final run to the top. Now you've got this. There are signs of habitation up here – the Restaurant Furkablick is one – but the buildings always look slightly abandoned, perhaps because that's exactly what they are for more than half the year.

Finally you round the last gentle bend and you're at the top. It's a cheerful, oddly peaceful place, never short of tourists but free from the tacky trappings of fully monetised masses. Sheep idle in a pen, tired cyclists mill around snapping photos of the signs. Bikes are good, eh?

Thanks to Swiss International Air Lines, Swiss Travel System and Switzerland Tourism



Previous pages: The final pair of hairpins are a treat after a long, slow ride up the side of the valley

Above: Switzerland's main roads are a gloriously smooth roadie heaven – 28mm tyres feel almost excessive here

Right: Another holiday snap ruined by a bullish photobomber

Is wider *faster?*

Grand Tour stages are routinely won on 28mm tyres, while Hour record holder Filippo Ganna rode on 25mm-wide tyres. But does this actually mean *wider = faster*?

Words **JAMES SPENDER** Photography **TAPESTRY**

TURBO 700x26C (26-622)

SCHWALBE
PRO ONE TT

In a recent white paper entitled *Total System Efficiency: Making You Faster*, engineers at Zipp put forward the idea that there are 'five principal impending forces acting on a cyclist… wind resistance, gravity, inertia, rolling resistance and vibration'. To move forward, you must overcome these forces by putting more energy into the rider-bike system than the sum forces acting against the path of travel. So where do tyres fit in? The simple answer is *everywhere*. However, to find a way into this extremely complex subject, let's start with that most touted term in regard to tyres: rolling resistance.

'As a tyre rolls along it deforms and relaxes, resulting in energy loss – that is rolling resistance,' says Oliver Kiesel, tyres and tubes product manager at Specialized. 'This is elastic hysteresis loss, which happens inside the compound of the tyre as it rolls through its contact patch.'

As a tyre rolls along the ground it deforms – flattening at the bottom, bulging at the sidewalls – before springing back. As this deforming-relaxing movement happens, molecules inside the tyre compound slide past each other, which creates internal friction, which is energy lost to heat. In theory, wider tyres can limit such losses.

'If we had a 23mm, 25mm and 28mm tyre of the same type and at the same pressure, rolling on a perfectly smooth road, the wider tyre would offer lower rolling resistance,' says Kiesel.

This is because the wider tyre has a shorter, wider contact patch (see diagram overleaf) that results in less material flexing compared to the thinner, longer contact patch of a narrower tyre. However, that's just one component of rolling resistance.

'Imagine every time a tyre rolls through a longer contact patch, there is more rubber in contact with the ground, and this leads to more frictional losses through traction – the friction that occurs between a drive wheel and road surface,' says Schwalbe's product manager, Felix Schäfermeier. As such, rolling resistance is primarily defined as losses through elastic hysteresis and traction, and a wider tyre can make useful savings.

'We observe that at 60psi, our 29mm tyre is essentially twice as efficient as a 27mm tyre,' says Jake Pantone, Enve's vice-president of product. But this is just the beginning.

Vibrational losses

'Taylor Phinney did this experiment in Paris-Roubaix,' says David Morse, advanced development engineer at Zipp. 'He tried to maintain 35kmh over different surfaces, and in the velodrome it took him 175 watts to achieve 35kmh, while on a dirt path it took him 210 watts. But on the Arenberg cobbles it took him 339 watts.'

The reason for such vast differences is that it takes more energy to travel over a rougher surface. Quite a lot more, thinks Morse.

'Let's assume you are a 100kg rider-bike system. You're riding over the cobbles and you get bounced up in the air by 1mm for one second. It takes roughly a joule of energy to raise 100kg by 1mm, and a joule per second is a watt. So you can see it doesn't take a lot of movement before those losses stack up. It might look smooth but your average asphalt road can produce a lot of bumps.'

This led Zipp to study vibrational losses in relation to tyre pressure, using an 85kg rider-bike system on a rolling road 'that simulated poor-condition asphalt', riding at 32kmh on 28mm Zipp Tangente Speed RT28 tyres. The observed result was a '48-watt decrease in power required between 90psi and 30psi'.

Admittedly these numbers did raise eyebrows among some of our experts (this is Zipp's research after all, and each manufacturer will point to its own), but all agreed with the basic theory: a smoother path of travel is a faster one. So surely all you need to do to unlock some free speed is to drop your tyre pressure, no matter the width?

The effect of volume

'A tyre needs to support the rider,' says Enve's Pantone. 'Go too low with tyre pressure and you start sacrificing aspects of ride quality – standing up and sprinting you will feel the bike wallowing, or going into a corner you'll feel the tyre start to roll sideways. Wider tyres allow you to run lower pressures before this happens, and that's because there's an inverse relationship between pressure and volume.'

> 'If you get bounced in the air by 1mm for one second, that's a watt. It doesn't take long for losses to stack up'

In other words, the higher the tyre volume, the lower the pressure needed to provide adequate support. It's the reason a car tyre might be 38psi while a track cyclist might be running 160psi, and to understand this we need to know two things.

First, a pressurised tyre is subject to 'cylinder stress', where the contained air is trying to push its way out with equal force in all directions across the inside of the tyre and rim bed. Second, pressure = force ÷ area, hence psi: 'pounds per square inch'. A 90psi tyre functions as if 90lb of weight is pushing on every 1in x 1in square of tyre.

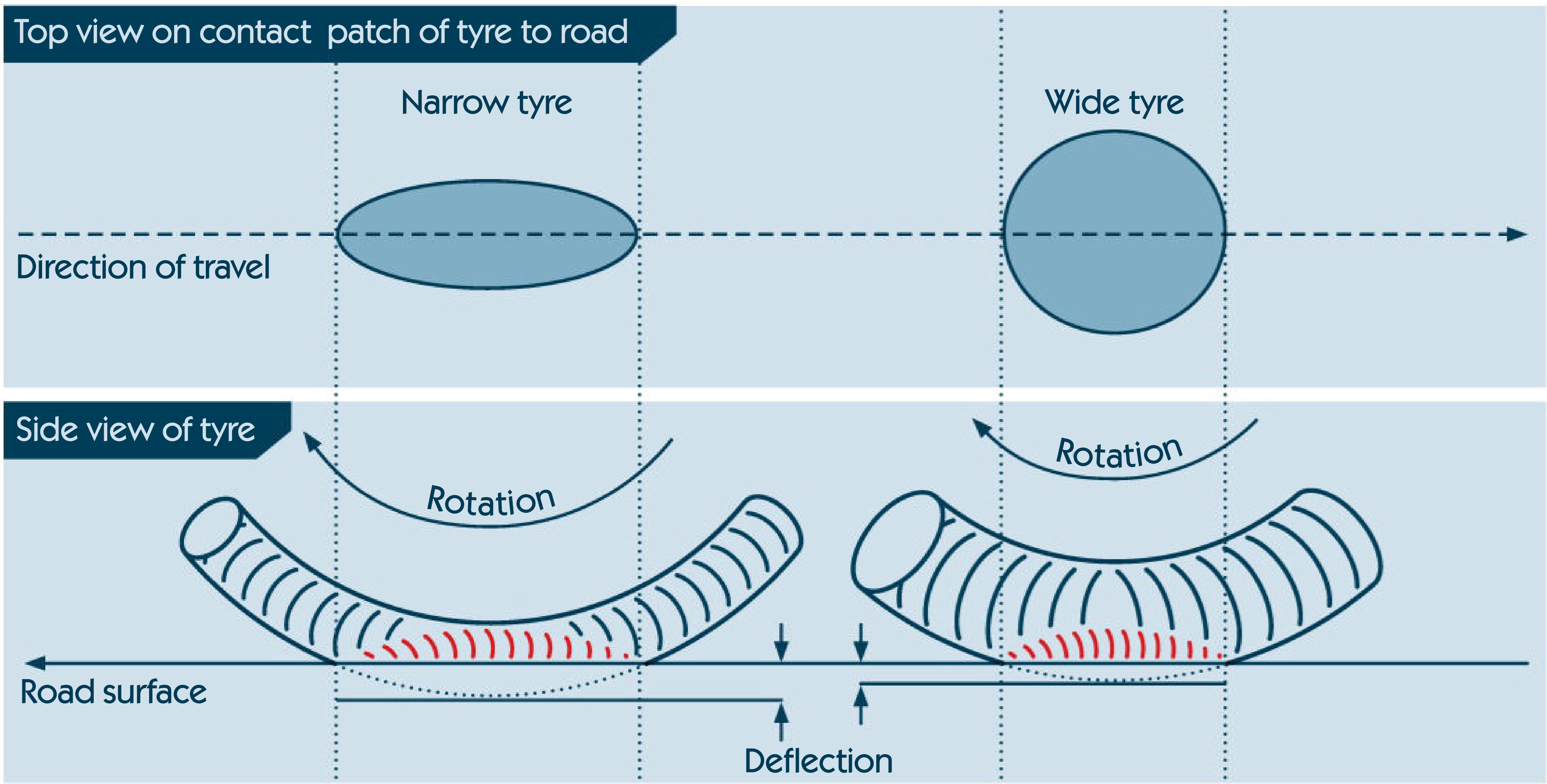
Now imagine a 23mm and a 28mm tyre, both cut in half across their width and laid flat like belts. The 28mm tyre is visibly larger, and it has a greater surface area (it's around 1.3 times larger, but we'll spare you the maths). Now imagine those tyres intact, on wheels and inflated to 90psi. Every square inch of each tyre has 90lb of force pushing on it, only here's the thing: the 28mm tyre is made up of more square inches, hence more force is acting upon the 28mm tyre's walls – the cylinder stress is greater, the tyre *is stiffer*. The upshot is that a wider tyre can offer adequate rider-bike support at much lower pressure than a narrow tyre, which leads to ▶

How fast is my tyre?

Below is a table of a selection of some tyres that are pretty fast and some that are very popular but much less fast. This data comes from independent tester Bicycle Rolling Resistance (bicyclerollingresistance.com) and it suggests a few interesting things. First, tubeless is speed king; second, in pure rolling resistance terms, higher pressure = lower rolling resistance; and third, construction and compound play a crucial role, as all other factors here are equal, even most of the tyre widths.

Tyre	Type	Width (mm)	Weight (g)	RR (W) med	RR (W) high	RR (W) extra	RR (W) ultra	Position overall
Vittoria Corsa Speed G+ 2.0 TLR	Tubeless	25	227	9.3	8.4	7.5	7	1
Continental GP5000 TT TdF	Tubeless	25	210	9.8	9	7.6	7.2	2
Schwalbe Pro One TT TLE	Tubeless	25	222	10.7	9.2	8.1	7.5	3
Continental GP5000 S TR	Tubeless	28	265	11.2	9.7	9.1	8.5	7
Michelin Power Cup TLR	Tubeless	25	259	12.7	11.5	9.6	9.6	11
Zipp Tangente Speed Tubeless	Tubeless	25	295	14.3	12.1	10.3	9.8	13
S-Works Turbo RapidAir 2Bliss Ready	Tubeless	26	261	14.7	11.7	10.5	9.9	15
Continental GP5000	Tube type	25	221	14.2	12.1	10.7	10	17
Schwalbe Pro One TLE	Tubeless	25	263	14.7	12.5	11.2	10.2	23
Enve SES Road Tire	Tubeless	25	243	17.2	14.4	12.4	11.4	33
Pirelli P Zero Race 4S	Tube type	26	233	16.5	14	12.3	11.6	35
Hutchinson Fusion 5 Galactik 11Storm	Tubeless	25	226	16.9	14.8	13.1	12	43
Vittoria Corsa G+ 2.0	Tube type	25	260	18.6	15.5	14	13	61
Mavic Yksion Elite	Tube type	25	226	21.6	17.9	16.1	15	87
Continental Gatorskin	Tube type	25	255	26.2	22	20.2	19.3	110

RR = Rolling resistance. Tests conducted on a rolling drum at tyre speed 28.8kmh, tyre load 42.5kg, internal rim width 17.8mm. RR med = 66psi (22-24mm), 60psi (25-27mm), 54psi (28-29mm); RR high = 88, 80, 72psi; RR extra = 110, 100, 90psi; RR ultra = 132, 120, 108psi


Top view on contact patch of tyre to road
Narrow tyre
Wide tyre
Direction of travel
Side view of tyre
Rotation
Rotation
Road surface
Deflection

Continental
GRAND PRIX 5000 S TR
MADE IN GERMANY

vittoria
CORSA
N.EXT
GRAPHENE - SILICA
700x
32c
32-622
MAX PRESSURE PSI / BAR
TUBE 95 / 6.5

lower vibrational losses. And here, there is one more clever thing that wide tyres do.

Spring rate

'Imagine a 100mm suspension fork,' says Vittoria's Avery. 'The spring rate curves up quickly [it goes from being easy to compress to much harder to compress] because you only have 100mm of travel before you bottom out. But if you have 170mm travel, the spring rate curve can be much shallower – it can be super-soft and responsive for the first 50mm as you have 120mm left to play with. A wider tyre is like a bigger fork – it is taller, so it has more travel, if you like – and it can be run at a lower pressure in a way that means its spring rate can be shallower or more progressive.'

It's a bit like a tennis ball versus a child's plastic soccer ball. The tennis ball is low volume and high pressure; squeeze it hard and it gives a little but soon resists further compression. The football is high volume and low pressure; squeeze it more gently and it gives a lot before becoming progressively harder to compress. You can stand on both without total collapse.

What we want from our tyres is the perfect blend of soccer ball and tennis ball – easier to deform (limiting vibrational losses), but not deforming so much as to lose stability or incur undue losses through rolling resistance. This latter point is very much one of conjecture – does rolling resistance matter in terms of pressure? It depends on who you ask and how you measure.

Pressure

'At 48kmh our 27mm tyre becomes 17.4 watts more efficient by going from 40psi to 80psi,' says Enve's Pantone, although he points out this is on a smooth steel drum 'most unlike the real world'. Conversely, Specialized's Kiesel points to a difference of two watts between his 30mm tyre at 60psi and 80psi. And then there's Morse at Zipp, who says, 'Rolling resistance is largely controlled by tyre compound and construction techniques – how thick the tread is, how many plies, the carcass material,' – a point on which Schwalbe's Schäfermeier also agrees. So what might be a sweet spot for pressure and width?

Zipp and Enve are two companies with online pressure calculators that claim to be geared up for real-world conditions, and throwing a few numbers into them elicits the following: an 82kg rider with a 27-31mm tyre should ride at 58psi, says Enve, while a 50kg rider should go down to 39psi. Zipp is perhaps strangely more conservative given its earlier research, recommending around 62psi for an 82kg rider on 30mm tyres, 51psi for a 50kg rider.

Still, putting this all in perspective, it's clear that wider tyres at lower pressures are faster. So how wide should we go?

Other variables

The objection goes – wide tyres are all very well, but what about weight and drag? Again, there are various answers, but here is some compelling food for thought for starters. First, weight.

'In terms of going up a hill, 100g is negligible compared to the 100kg rider-bike system,' says Zipp's Morse. 'But when we're accelerating we can *feel* the

30-622
ROTATION

Tread carefully

The pattern on a tyre's tread might be more useful than you realise

'For grip on a road tyre, the tread pattern doesn't matter nearly as much as the compound,' says Schwalbe's Felix Schäfermeier. 'If you have a good compound, it will perform better than a really rough tread pattern. From our perspective we use the tread pattern to reduce aerodynamic drag.'

'The tread is super-critical [for aerodynamics],' agrees Enve's Jake Pantone. 'The tread not being smooth creates a little bit of turbulence as the air hits it, which creates a boundary layer of air that basically prevents there being suction between the air and the tyre. The turbulent layer lets the air slide really quickly over the tyre without getting stuck to it.'

But does tread offer more than just aero gains? The jury is out, but Vittoria's Ken Avery certainly thinks so.

'The grooves down the shoulders of our Corsa tyres play a big role. They go circumferentially so they allow the casing to flex more easily as they allow the tyre to collapse sort of inwardly as it rolls. It also helps with grip, it provides channels for moisture to be released from the contact patch, and it presents an effective edge that resists drifting out of a corner.'

The internal width of a rim directly impacts the width of a tyre, which is one of the reasons it's hard to say 'Xmm is the fastest tyre choice'

increased mass, right? But if you do the calculations, a WorldTour sprinter riding at 1,500W loses just 1.3 watts if tyre weight increases by 100g. And most of us aren't riding at 1,500W, so I would argue weight doesn't mean anything.'

This point is also echoed by Ken Avery from Vittoria, who adds, 'The difference between 25mm and 28mm is around 10g. It's hardly worth worrying about.'

Then, aero. Without delving too deep into this very complex subject, both Zipp and Enve – whose stock in trade is aero – agree changing tyre sizes by millimetres results in losses of just a few watts, which could be considered huge in the aero gains game, but for most riders might seem a fair enough trade-off. So given all this, what is a sweet-spot tyre size? Again, it depends on who you ask, and it also depends on one final factor: internal rim width.

Final choice

'For us, the Enve 29mm tyre on our 25mm internal rim hits the best balance,' says Pantone. 'It actually measures up close to 30mm.' And this is the thing – the internal width of a rim directly impacts the width of a tyre, which is one of the reasons it's hard to say 'Xmm is the fastest tyre choice'. It also impacts its tyre profile, which has connotations for aerodynamics and vibrational losses.

'From an aero standpoint, the rim-tyre interface is critical, so if you put a 28mm tyre on a 19mm rim you'll end up with a bulbous tyre shape that just won't be efficient,' says Pantone in reference to aerodynamics. However, go the other way and there are problems too.

'If you have a too narrow tyre on a too wide rim the sidewalls become pretty straight,' says Kiesel. 'This leads to a kind of bad behaviour in compression. A little bit of a balloon shape allows the tyre to flex better. So we see from testing, in terms of aerodynamics and rolling resistance, the sweet spot is a 21mm internal rim with 26mm or 28mm tyre. A 25mm internal rim is too much.'

Again, it's all a trade-off, before one last curve ball thrown in by Kiesel.

'There are those pushing hard for wider tyres because they make wider rims. They claim there are performance reasons, but a lot of it is down to manufacturing. They are making hookless rims because they are easier to manufacture, but the maximum recommended hookless tyre pressure is 72.5psi [according to the European Tyre and Rim Technical Organisation, ETRTO]. So if you are limited to that pressure, your rims and tyres will have to be wider, because only wide tyres will perform well at this pressure – a 28mm tyre at 72.5psi will be slower than a 30mm tyre – and wide tyres need wide rims to support them properly.'

On that note, we'll return to those who just make tyres for the last word.

'If you are using 17-19mm internal width rims, then 25mm is still a really good option for a good tyre shape. For 20mm, there's a really good benefit with 28mm tyres, and when you get closer to 25mm, then 30mm or 32mm tyres are a good option,' says Schäfermeier from Schwalbe. But if you really just want one answer to this question, just ask Avery from Vittoria.

'In real life, from rider feedback, 28mm is the new normal because of the entire package. It's the size that's going to reduce the time it takes from point A to point B.'

James Spender is a writer and regular Cyclist *contributor, and is also the foremost authority on flat tyres, bar none*

No sleep till Kigali

The Race Around Rwanda is an ultra-endurance loop of the Land of a Thousand Hills – part bikepacking odyssey, part study in sleep deprivation. *Cyclist* learns about freezing rain, spiders and hallucinations on the red gravel roads of Africa

Words **GRAHAM WILLGOSS** Photography **MATT GRAYSON**

‘Picture someone with a machete trying to cut through a jungle,’ says Simon Jones. ‘That’s what we were doing for 30km, trying to descend out of this rainforest.’

If that’s how the rider who managed to finish 15th overall in this year’s Race Around Rwanda sums up the route’s more difficult – scratch that: borderline impassable – sections, then you can be sure he wasn’t alone.

‘People were posting in the group chat asking if they’d gone the wrong way,’ he adds. ‘Because Rwanda is developing so quickly, some roads that were gravel a year ago are now paved. So the organisers just have to keep finding gnarlier sections to keep it at 400km of gravel.’

The Race Around Rwanda, first held in 2020, aims to cover 40% of its near-1,000km route on gravel as it takes in an anti-clockwise lap of Rwanda from Kigali, the capital. The other 600km is on tarmac, and the route takes in nearly 18,000m of elevation gain. The smooth, rich, red gravel roads you see here are typical. When it rains hard though, as it often does just a few degrees south of the equator, they can turn into what feels like a vertical mudslide.

The race’s near-1,000km route takes in nearly 18,000m of elevation gain

From Kigali, the route heads east, then north to the Twin Lakes – a pair of crater lakes bordering each other at the base of the Mount Muhabura – before cutting west across verdant, rolling hillsides, around volcanic national parks, through tea plantations and then south to the mountainous Nyungwe Forest. Four checkpoints offer basic lodging and warm meals but beyond that the event is fully self-supported and has a time limit of six days.

A total of 85 riders started the 2023 Race Around Rwanda in Kigali at around 4am on 5 February, and over the following pages we hear from four of them. But before we do, let’s get some more facts out of the way. Of those 85 starters, 60 finished the event. Rwanda’s lowest point is at about 950m above sea level, with much of the racing at 2,000m or above. Yes, it’s safe – in fact, the World Economic Forum rated Rwanda inside their top 10 safest countries as recently as 2017. No, you don’t get to see any gorillas en route.

Here, then, is the story of the 2023 Race Around Rwanda, from some of the people who rode it. ▸

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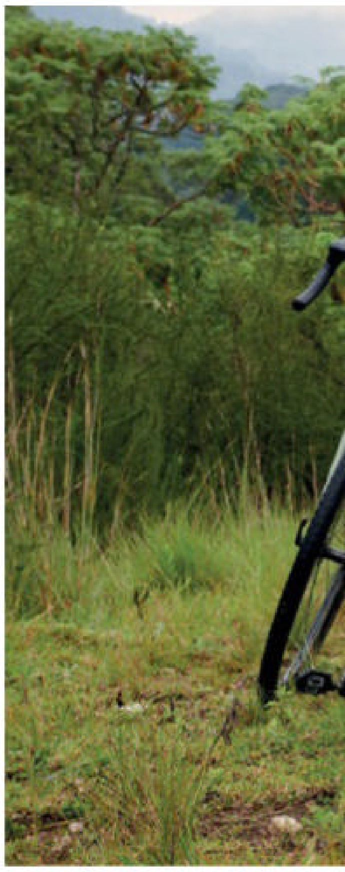
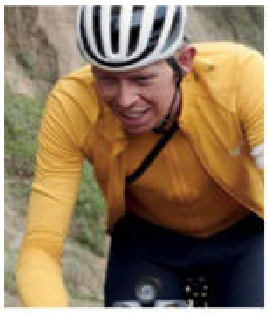


'I tried to sleep, but immediately 10 people would walk up and be looking at me,' says Jones. 'I went to call my friend to ask him to pick me up. He lives in France and doesn't even own a car. So yeah, I was in a bad way'



Simon Jones, 25

from Dublin, Ireland
15th overall

'On the first day I did 370km, riding from 4am until just after midnight, and slept for two hours. Then about 4pm the following day I had a 20-minute nap and felt good. I went into this shop and bought every bottle of Coke they had and my first ever Red Bull. I typically don't use caffeine but in my head it was like: top 10 or die trying.

'By the time I got to Checkpoint 3 (CP3) it was 7pm. The guy asked, "Would you like a room?" I should have known from his reaction that saying no was a bad idea. Still, off I went into the night, and that's when the route got insane.

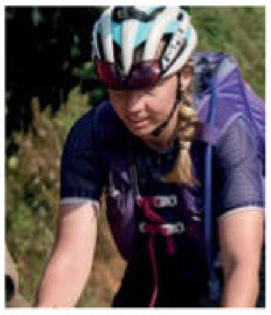
'There was a 70km section that on normal gravel would take maybe three hours. It took me eight or nine. They have these bridges made of parallel wooden logs. In the rain, these logs are completely slick, and at night you can't see them, so you're bombing down a descent and all of a sudden you see these black lines. If you hit one of those, you're finished.

'I managed to catch the pack fighting for top 10 but with 70km to go to CP4 my brain started to go really weird. All I had thought about for 12 hours was coming 10th and now I was wondering, "Why am I still in my cycling kit? I came 10th. The race is over." Yet my phone was saying I still had 200km to Kigali.

'I got to 30km before CP4 and collapsed on the side of the road, so I got a taxi to the next checkpoint.

'Imagine a confused foreigner with heatstroke came up to you in Sydney and said they wanted to go to Melbourne because they were trying to get to Brisbane. It ended up with about 15 or 20 locals discussing where I must have actually wanted to go. They eventually got it, but they wanted to know why. I was like, "Ah, so I can cycle back here." And the whole thing started over again.' ▶

'I was wondering, "Why am I still in my cycling kit? I came 10th. The race is over"'



Caroline Buckland, 32

from London, UK
DNF

'Three days in, at around 650km, we hit a rainstorm so this French couple and I found a derelict building. There were these strips of bark, which we laid on the floor as a makeshift bed. You can see the spiders underneath, but at that point you don't care. I stayed for three hours until it stopped raining at 1am, but my freehub had given up so I had to walk out of the rainforest and get three buses back to Kigali.

'I presumed I was out of the race, and that was a really rocky moment. I looked awful. I'd been sleeping in my kit and smelled awful. I had a good cry on this bus, which was absolutely jammed, even at 4am. When I waved it down, the driver said, "No, we're not taking the bike." I had to beg.

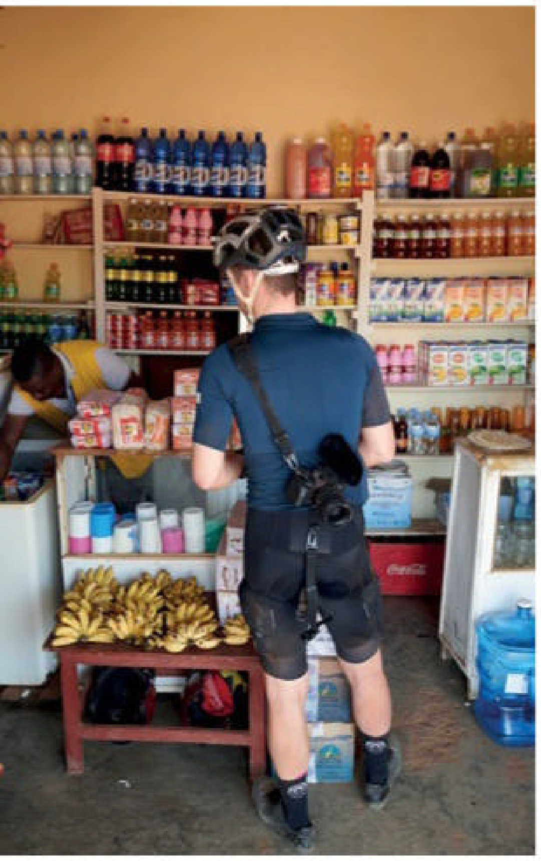
'Back in Kigali I found a mechanic who could fix my bike, and went for a shower. I had the start of trench foot because I'd been wearing my cycling shoes for 30 hours and tried to sleep in them. Then I got a taxi back to the point where I'd caught the first bus 17 hours earlier.

'Going through the rainforest at night was amazing. I caught up with the second group, and I was about to press on for the second night in a row, but my freehub went again about 90km from the end.

'I was in the middle of a village at midnight. I didn't have the tools I needed so there was nothing I could do. A moped taxi came round at about 4am and I managed to hail it down. So I'm on the back of this moped with my bike upside down on my lap, with the bars digging into my thighs. Then I had to get a bus back to Kigali. At that point I just thought, I'm going to call it.'

'I had the start of trench foot because I'd been wearing my cycling shoes for 30 hours'

This year's race was officially the third competitive edition. In 2021, a 6pm Covid curfew made racing impossible, and in 2022 there was a bikepacking trip on the original date, with the race itself held later in the year



32
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Available here
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TELEPHONE
TEL:0788680136
WELCOME

The route might look reasonably benign – apart from the dust – but the photographer only took pictures in places that were accessible by car. ‘The stuff that the cars *couldn’t* get to was insane,’ says competitor Simon Jones

Violette Neza, 21

from Kigali, Rwanda – 1st woman (9th overall)

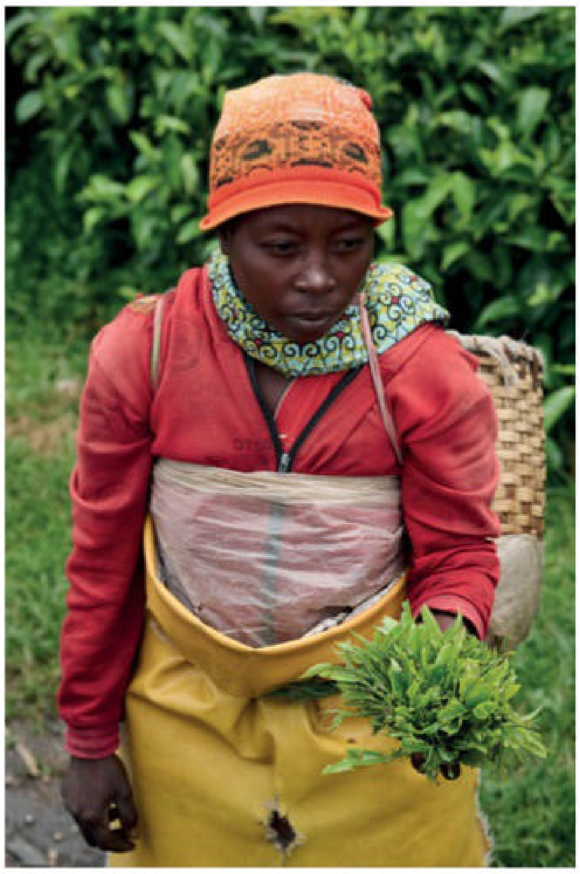
‘I came out of CP4, walking and riding through the forest in heavy rain. I shivered until I was frozen. It was midnight and I’d stopped in a village, looking for something – anything – to warm me up. I curled up in a ball. A family came and asked how they could help. They were very surprised to see a Rwandan girl riding a bike through the night and keeping up with the guys. To them it was like a miracle.

‘They asked if they could take care of me, but I told them, “It’s an unsupported race, I don’t think it’s allowed.” So they said, “If you don’t want to join us in our house, we can stand with you here.” I sat there shivering for almost an hour, then I called the organiser to see if it would be OK. His response was simple: “Health is first.” The villagers took me inside, made porridge for me, gave me a big coat and made a fire. I slept in the chair for almost three hours. Before I left, they took my bottles from my bike and poured porridge inside.

‘Soldiers stopped me twice. The first time they asked me, “Why are you here? Who gave you permission?” Like the villagers, they were surprised to see a girl riding through the night. I gave them the organiser’s number, but there was no signal. Fortunately it helped that I could speak to them in Kinyarwanda. The second time they searched my bags. I said, “I’m going to lose my position in the race!” In the end they wished me luck, but also told me, “Don’t come back again.”’

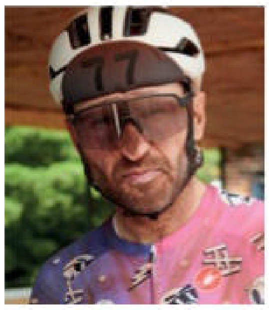
‘I was cold and sick, and I nearly gave up. But I made a promise to myself. I did it. I want to tell girls: we are powerful; we have to be fearless.’

‘Before I left, they took my bottles from my bike and poured porridge inside’



PEdALED
PEdALED
PEdALED

Entering the Race Around Rwanda costs from €270 (around $440). The 2024 date is yet to be confirmed but you can visit racearoundrwanda.com for details and updates



Elijus Čivilis, 41

from Vilnius, Lithuania
1st overall

‘I’ve done 24-hour races many times. One night is easy – we can all go out on Friday, have a fantastic party and keep on going through Saturday. But the whole magic is the second night. It’s just 1,000km. It’s doable.

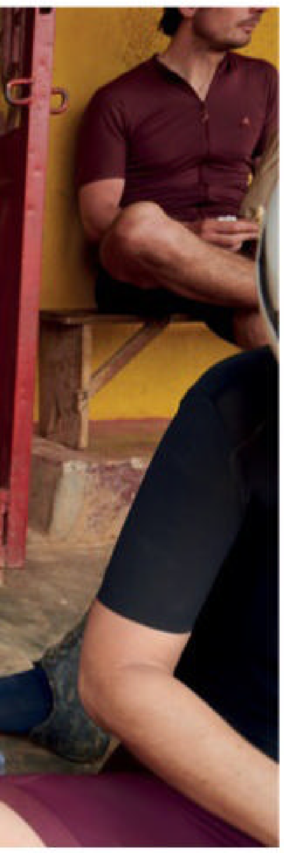
‘In ultra races you can, without alcohol or chemical substances, go to the borders of your mental perception. It’s fantastic. You are descending and your front light will throw out shadows that seem like animals, like people, like anything you can imagine. I’ve seen many elephants that turned out not to be there at all.

‘It’s quite scary because you don’t understand what is happening and you’re not capable of properly assessing your environment. And that’s dangerous. Luck has to be with you too because real animals *are* on the road – there are a lot of monkeys.

‘It got dark at around 6.30pm and most people go to sleep early, so you spend a lot of time alone in the dark. At a certain point your mind switches and gets with the flow of the experience. I started to feel like I wasn’t riding my bike – it was riding on its own. But then, next to me, my kids were riding together with my best friend. And I started chatting to them. I knew it wasn’t real but I knew I could use what I was feeling to stave off the urge to stop and sleep. I know it’s crazy but it helped process my emotions.

‘I finished in just less than 50 hours and, honestly, I felt nothing. You just stop riding. Where is the emotion? The sense of achievement? I called my family, who were all in the car on the school run. Hearing my wife’s voice, that’s when I started crying. I couldn’t really speak. She understood. That was the finish line for me.’

‘Most people go to sleep early, so you spend a lot of time alone in the dark’



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Cosmic revival

After a turbulent few years, the iconic French brand Mavic is back and aiming to return to the top

Words **EMMA COLE**
Photography **FRED MACGREGOR**

In May 2020 Mavic was placed into receivership. The company had six months to find a buyer

In the world of cycling, it's hard to find a brand quite as emblematic as Mavic. With its trademark yellow and black logo, Mavic is synonymous with the sport and has been at its heart, both as innovator and benefactor, for well over a century.

Formed in 1889 by two Frenchmen, Charles Idoux and Lucien Chanel, the brand lays claim to a host of firsts for the cycling industry: the first aluminium rim, the first disc wheel, the first electronic groupset, the Dura alloy rims that weighed only 750g, and the tri-spoked 3G wheel that helped take Chris Boardman to Olympic individual pursuit gold in 1992.

Then there's the neutral service, which arguably cemented the brand in cycle sport legend. It was 1972 when Bruno Gormand, then chairman of Mavic, proposed providing technical assistance to riders regardless of their teams, and it was 1973 when Paris-Nice became the first race to have neutral support.

Mavic went on to support the Tour de France for over 40 years, its yellow and black motorbikes and cars a constant sight, whizzing alongside the peloton, laden with extra bikes and wheels.

But three years ago, everything changed. Mavic no longer provides neutral support for the Tour or for any other ASO race for that matter.

'The contract with ASO came up for renewal at the time of our difficulties and so we weren't able to pay,' explains Michel Lethenet, a former mountain bike journalist who is now Mavic's global PR manager. 'But it is also true that ASO raised the price dramatically. Perhaps it is for the best and we can see it as an opportunity that we are no longer tied to that contract.'

Survival of the fittest

The 'difficulties' Lethenet alludes to are three turbulent years that jeopardised the brand's very existence and saw Mavic's stature in the cycling world diminished.

In May 2020 Mavic was placed into receivership by a Grenoble court because it was in serious financial trouble. The company had six months to find a buyer or faced having its business shut down and its assets liquidated.

To add insult to injury, there were questions over who actually owned the brand. Amer Sports Group sold Mavic in 2019 to an American private equity company, Regent LP, but the way the private equity company was set up meant it wasn't clear who the actual owner was.

Among much furore, the worker's union demanded to see the full accounts and condition of sale. A few months later, and after much publicity, Mavic was bought by French investment firm the Bourrelier Group, granting the brand a second life and returning it full circle to French ownership.

'There were 14 buyers to choose from but being bought by a French company felt like the right move for us and we retain our French heritage,' says Lethenet.

The sale also guaranteed the retention of the Mavic rim factory in Saint-Trivier-sur-Moignans, 130km west of Annecy in southeast France, which *Cyclist*

Top left: Sebastian Lejeune is the brains behind the new Cosmic Ultimate 45 Disc wheel

Right: Although no longer supporting ASO races, Mavic's iconic neutral service arm lives on

Previous pages: Mavic's shiny new HQ in Annecy, France was built in nine months and is a beacon of hope after a difficult period visited in 2015. But taking over a financially stricken business has ramifications.

'For the new owners the only solution was to divide the manpower by two,' says Lethenet. 'Before the takeover we had a 250-strong workforce but they only kept about 110 people so this had a big impact on our resources and our ability to maintain our ranges.

'We had to completely reorganise the clothing side of the business as we lost the material sourcing and production means, which we were sharing with Salomon [also owned by Amer]. Clothing used to account for 20% of the turnover but since then it has dropped.

'Our wheel range was also downsized. Back in 2018, we had 35 different wheels and sometimes the difference was just the spoke, with maybe a 10g difference. The other solution would have been to buy a product and put our label on it, but that's not the way Mavic works.'

Having been rescued from liquidation, the rebuilding of Mavic included moving to a shiny new headquarters in Annecy, complete with testing facilities, service centre and factory. The brand moved into the new HQ in January 2022 but there wasn't enough power for all the staff and machines to work in the building. Those who could worked from home until February, when another generator was added. The temperature outside was -10°C.

Despite this glitch, Lethenet says the building is testament to Mavic's ambitions.

'There are no offices on the top floor – it is just a big empty room – but we hope to fill it up once we start to grow again. The plan is to go back to the level we were at five years ago and the building is designed to adapt to our recovery.

'The Mavic from before only cared about margins, but now we are going right back to basics and focusing on quality and high performance,' Lethenet adds.

As *Cyclist* wanders around the new building, the brand's heritage is on full display, with wheels and bikes decorating the walls, marking important moments in

Right: Each Cosmic Ultimate is individually laser-engraved

Below: It takes three to four months to train someone up to build the new wheel, as the process is extremely technical and precise

Wheels of time

A quick dash through the history of the Manufacture d'Articles Vélocipediques Idoux et Chanel – or Mavic to you and us

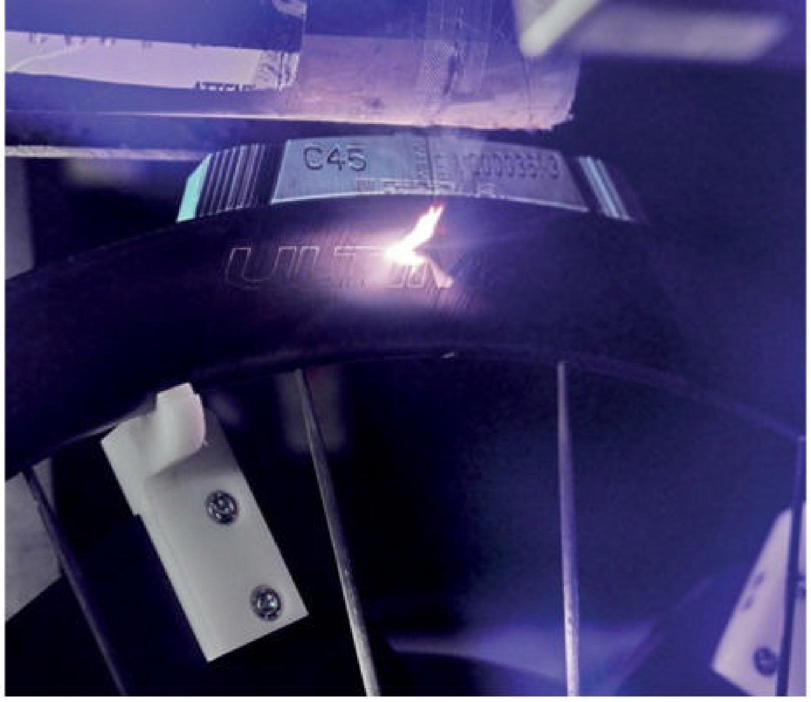
1889 ▸ Charles Idoux and Lucien Chanel form Mavic and focus on spare parts.

1934 ▸ Mavic creates the Dura tube rim, the first bicycle rim constructed from aluminium alloy, which weighs 750g.

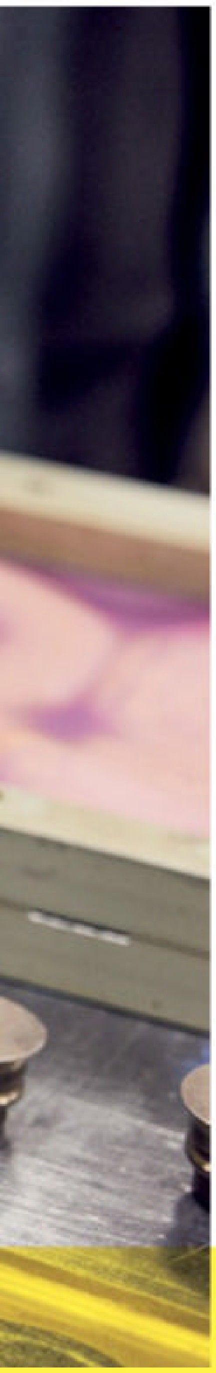
1973 ▸ The brand starts focusing on wheels and launches its neutral support service.

1975 ▸ Mavic designs the double-hook-bridge rim to seat a high-pressure tyre, developed alongside Michelin.

1985 ▸ The Comete carbon fibre disc wheel is launched, marking a new era of aerodynamics and lightweight construction.



COMPETITIVE ANALYSIS – Static
MAVIC



> ‘The Mavic from before only cared about margins, but we are going right back to basics and focussing on quality’

history and, of course, there’s even an original service car. It’s also striking to see the century-old Mavic logo from 1923 frequently in use.

Wheel of fortune

The Mavic of today is focused on wheels, and the new facility at Annecy is where its latest creation – the Cosmic Ultimate 45 Disc – is made. Three years in development, the Ultimate is the wheel that the manufacturer hopes will return it to the top table and underpins its newfound focus on making everything in Europe.

Sebastian Lejeune, research and development product manager at Mavic, is the brains behind the new wheel. ‘We use five different types of carbon fibre and 71 pieces of carbon to create the wheel, and we have a team of 10 people who build and assemble the Ultimate. It is a very particular job as we have designed the whole process and machines ourselves, so each person has gone through three to four months of training,’ he says.

‘Every wheel takes eight hours to assemble, and when you add in the baking process it adds up to between one-and-a-half to two days to make one wheel.’

Which could explain the $6,500 (approx., converted) pricetag. And Mavic will be banking on selling enough of the new Ultimates to pay back the investment that came with the recent change of ownership.

‘We had to explain to the new owners all about the new Ultimate and convince them they needed to invest in the people and the machines,’ says Lejeune. ‘But we were also kind of lucky because it happened during Covid-19 so everybody had slowed down anyway.’

Having come back from the brink of bankruptcy, it is no surprise that Mavic is conscious of its future sustainability, and not just the financial sort. ▶

1994 ▶
Mavic becomes part of the Salomon Group and is no longer French-owned.

1997 ▶
Introduction of the 3G wheel with three profiled carbon spokes.

1999 ▶
Mavic launches the first wireless electronic groupset, the Mektronic.

2005 ▶
Amer Sports Group buys the Salomon Group, including Mavic.

2008 ▶
Mavic launches its range of cycling clothing, shoes and accessories.

2017 ▶
Mavic celebrates 40 years of Tour de France partnership.

2020
Mavic is acquired by the Bourrelier Group and returned to French ownership.

Top right: Head of product management Maxime Brunard says the new Ultimate offers the ideal balance of inertia and lateral stiffness for all-round performance

Left: All Mavic wheels come with a lifetime warranty and can be repaired at the on-site service centre

> ‘We are still not profitable, but we are working on it. We are rebuilding from the ground up’

‘We know that recycling carbon fibre is a big issue, and at the moment the whole process in the industry is not ready yet, but we are looking for ways to compensate for this,’ says Lejeune. ‘Like with the new Ultimate, if you break something we can cut all the spokes, remove them and reuse the rim. It’s not perfect, but it is a lot better than previous models.’

‘If we have to scrap something, usually it will be about 400g to 500g of carbon fibre, which is nothing compared to the tonnes that are being scrapped by bigger consumers, such as in the aviation industry,’ adds Maxime Brunard, Mavic’s head of product management.

‘The fibre could be recyclable if it was separated from the resin, which at the moment can only be done at very, very high temperatures, which uses a lot of energy and so in the end is not worth it. For us the best solution is to make sure that the wheel is durable and strong enough so, unless you crash, there is no reason for the wheel to lose its performance.

‘Unlike aluminium, carbon has a very good resistance to time, it doesn’t fatigue so you’ll keep it forever, which is why we offer a lifetime warranty. Nothing can really go wrong unless we messed up, and in that case it’s covered under warranty.’

But for a company that has struggled financially, and so nearly went out of business, how commercially viable is a lifetime warranty?

‘It’s a little bit like a fridge in the 1950s,’ says Brunard. ‘There was a time when everybody wanted to have a fridge so there was a huge market and you just replaced it when it wore out.

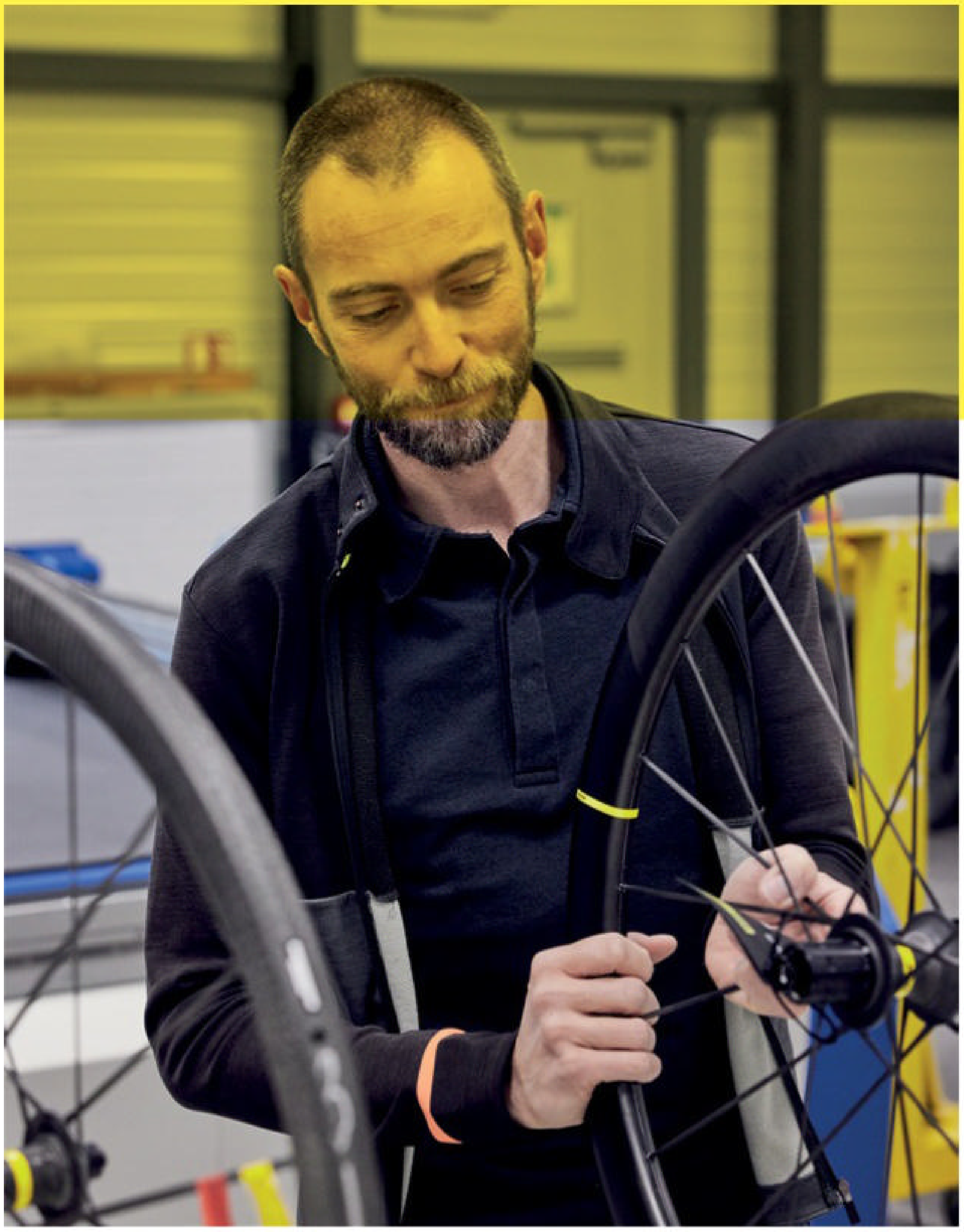
‘Then there are trends, things become outdated and, at some point, people will want a newer version. Maybe next time we’ll find a way to make it another 100g lighter with a wider rim or a different shape.’

High spirits

Those that *Cyclist* talked to at the new Mavic facility in Annecy are plainly delighted that the brand is back in French hands and focused on the job of wheel production once again, and they have confidence in the company’s future, but it isn’t out of the woods just yet.

‘We are still not profitable, but we are working on it,’ admits Lethenet. ‘We are rebuilding from the ground up and that takes time because we have fewer people and less means than we had before. For sure we have lost momentum and we have made mistakes, but we will regain the confidence of consumers. It’s the Mavic spirit and it is still very much alive.’

Emma Cole is features writer for Cyclist, *the magazine that has been at the heart of cycling for only 123 years less than Mavic*



Ultimate fighter

Will the Cosmic Ultimate 45 Disc be the wheel that puts Mavic back on top?

Mavic’s latest wheelset is among the lightest in its class at 1,255g, but the company insists the Cosmic Ultimate 45 Disc is more than just a number on a set of scales.

‘The new Ultimate doesn’t favour extreme light weight above all else,’ says Maxime Brunard, head of product management. ‘Instead we chose to balance inertia against lateral stiffness to ensure the wheel provides excellent all-round performance.’

By modern trends, the wheel could be said to be conservative, with its hooked rim walls and 19mm internal width. Many brands are now opting for hookless rims and ever-wider internal dimensions to better suit wide tubeless tyres, but again Brunard suggests the Ultimate is aimed at what consumers actually want.

‘We don’t believe that all customers are ready to be limited by 75psi or only use 28mm tyres, so we haven’t gone hookless or super-wide with the wheel’s internal width.’

ULTIMATE
C45

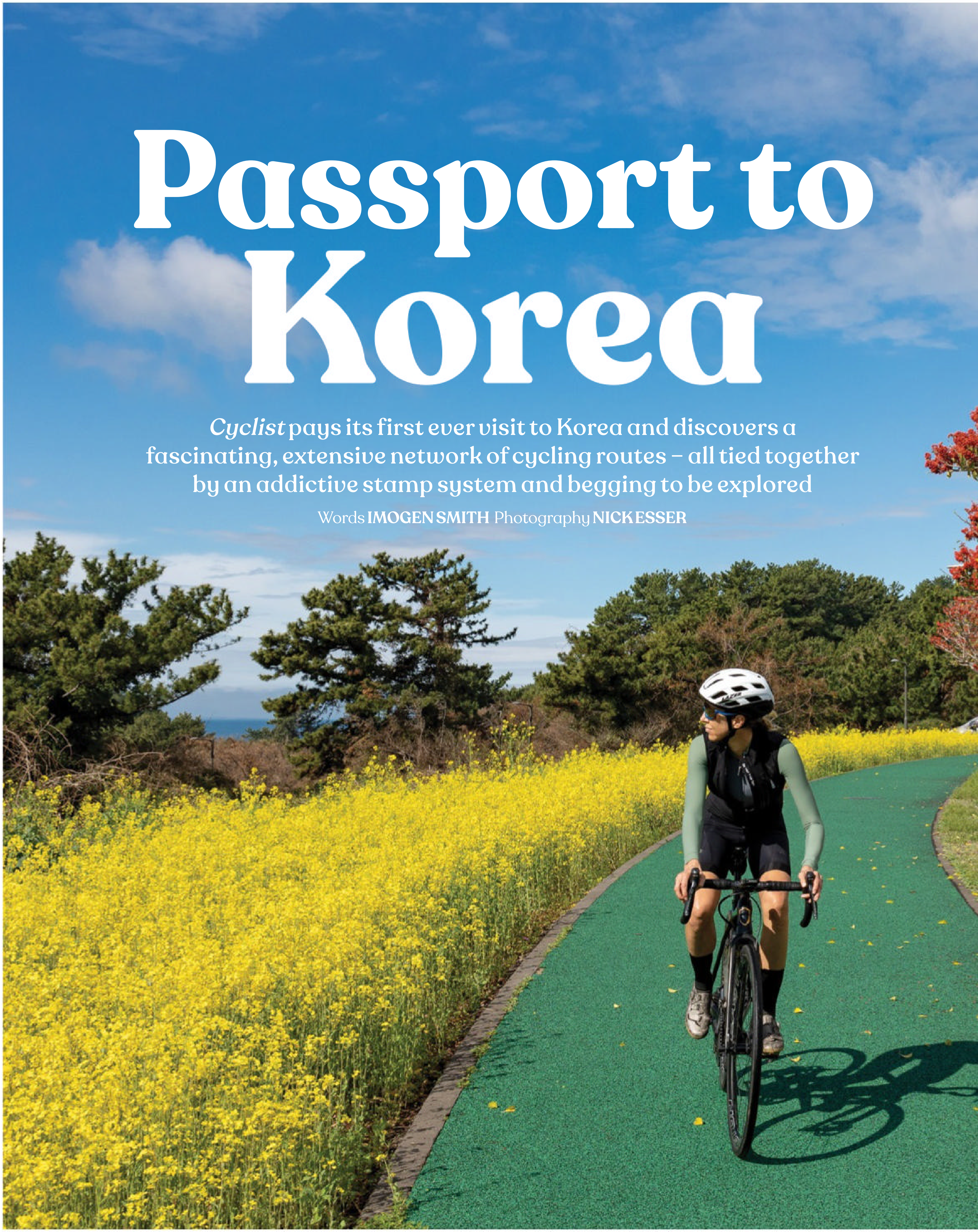
Cosmic Ultimate 45 Disc

Weight 1,255g pair (575g front, 680g rear)
Material Carbon fibre
Rim height 45mm
Internal rim width 19mm
External rim width 28mm
Disc brake-specific
No tape tubeless profile
Spokes 10 R2R unidirectional carbon fibre on each wheel
Price $6,500 (approx., converted)

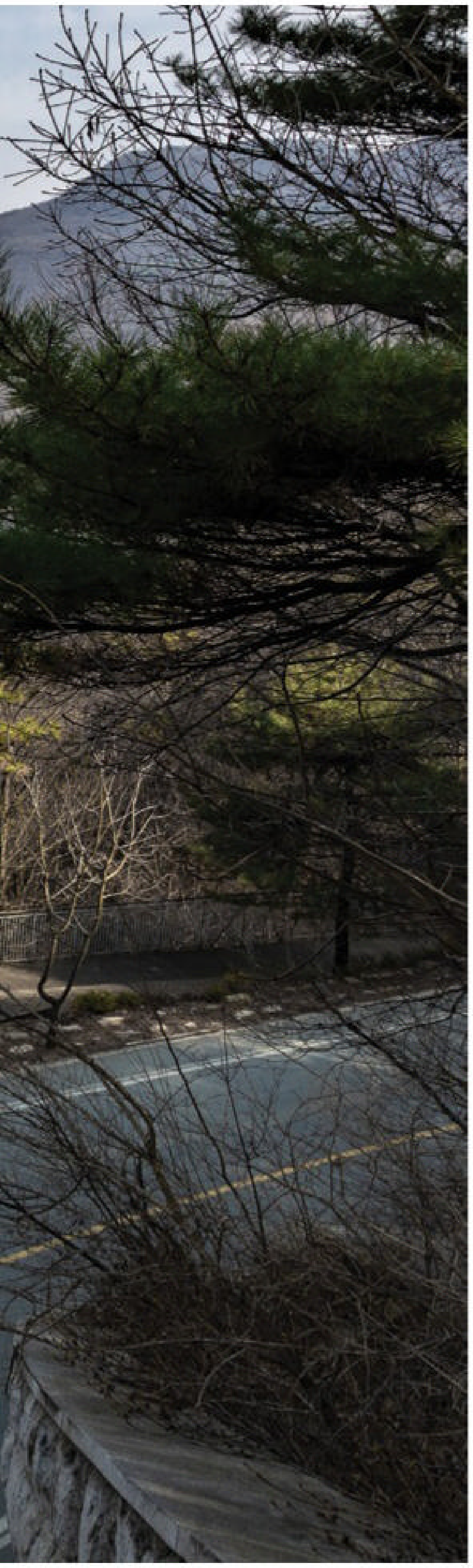
Passport to Korea

Cyclist pays its first ever visit to Korea and discovers a fascinating, extensive network of cycling routes – all tied together by an addictive stamp system and begging to be explored

Words **IMOGEN SMITH** Photography **NICK ESSER**



Thousands of high-rise apartments merge and creep through valleys like glaciers, the toilets sing to you, and hotel receptions are staffed by robots



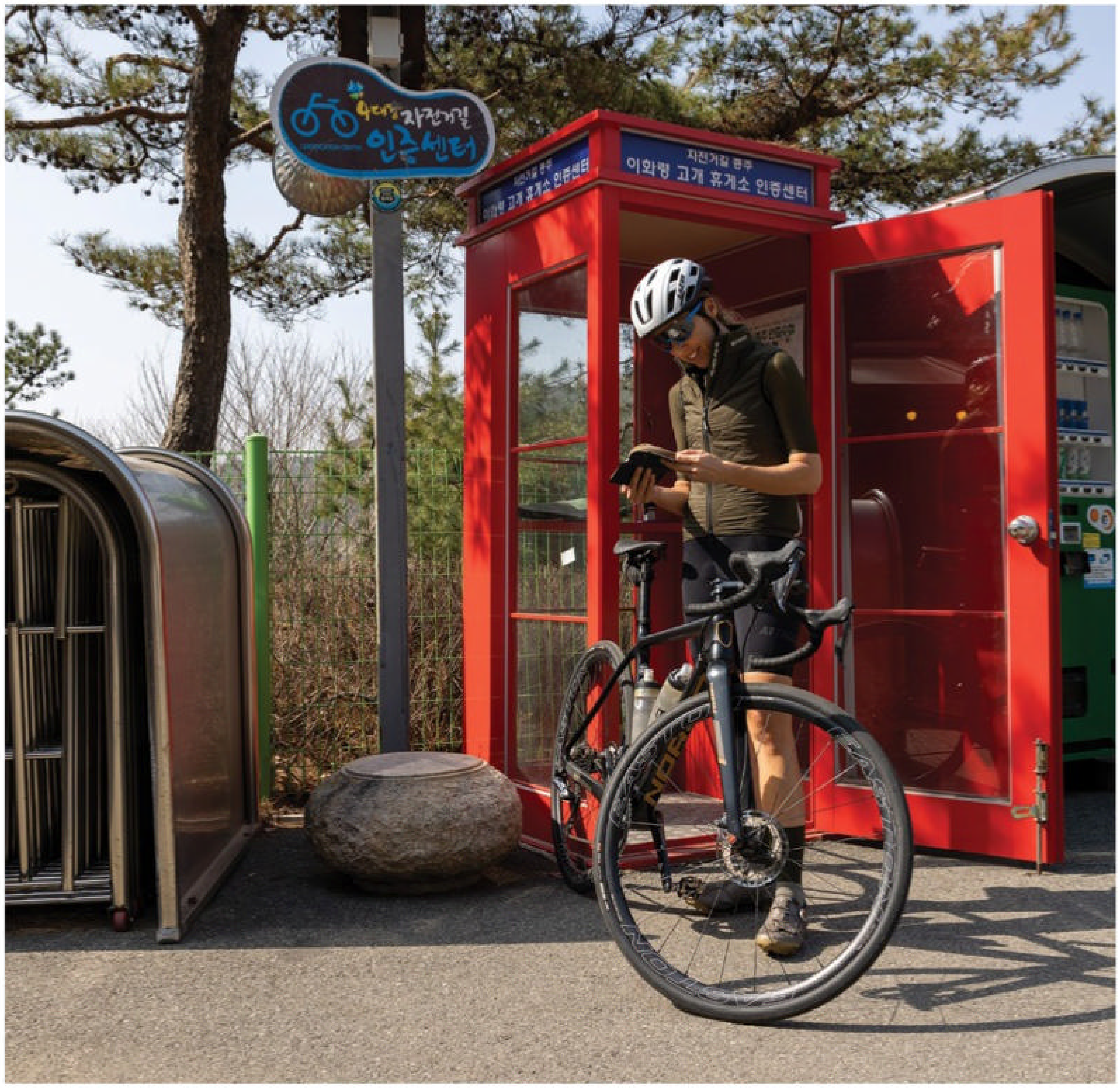
With 1,745km of dedicated, wide, and fast bike path in an area roughly the size of New Zealand's North Island, South Korea has some of the best, most accessible cycling infrastructure in the world. You can ride for days on end without ever meeting a motorist. You can camp in the centre of towns. Everything is clean and neat and you can walk off and leave your bike unattended while you go into a convenience store because the crime rate is zero. While Aussies and Kiwis looking for active holidays in east Asia might think first of Japan, Korea is coming hot on its neighbour's heels: it's cheap and easy to get to, serves up delicious and varied cuisine, plus it offers Westerners the chance to really get out of their comfort zone.

First things first

We arrive in Seoul to a blur of late-night neon and head straight to bed at our hotel. The next morning, the sun dawns on a new world, where thousands of high-rise apartment blocks merge and creep through valleys like glaciers, the toilets sing to you, and hotel receptions are staffed by robots. The next thing we notice is that we don't have jetlag. Depending on the time of year, there's only one hour's time difference between most of Australia and Seoul, so despite the 10-hour flight, we're fresh and ready to ride.

This being Korea, however, it's essential to perform a little bit of administration first, beginning with a visit to a tourism office at the massive Incheon port where we purchase (for a few dollars) our cycling passports. There, with a similar amount of bureaucratic paper-shuffling as you'd need to get a real passport, we're officially inducted into Korea's very serious, very rigorous, and very entertaining Bike Certification System.

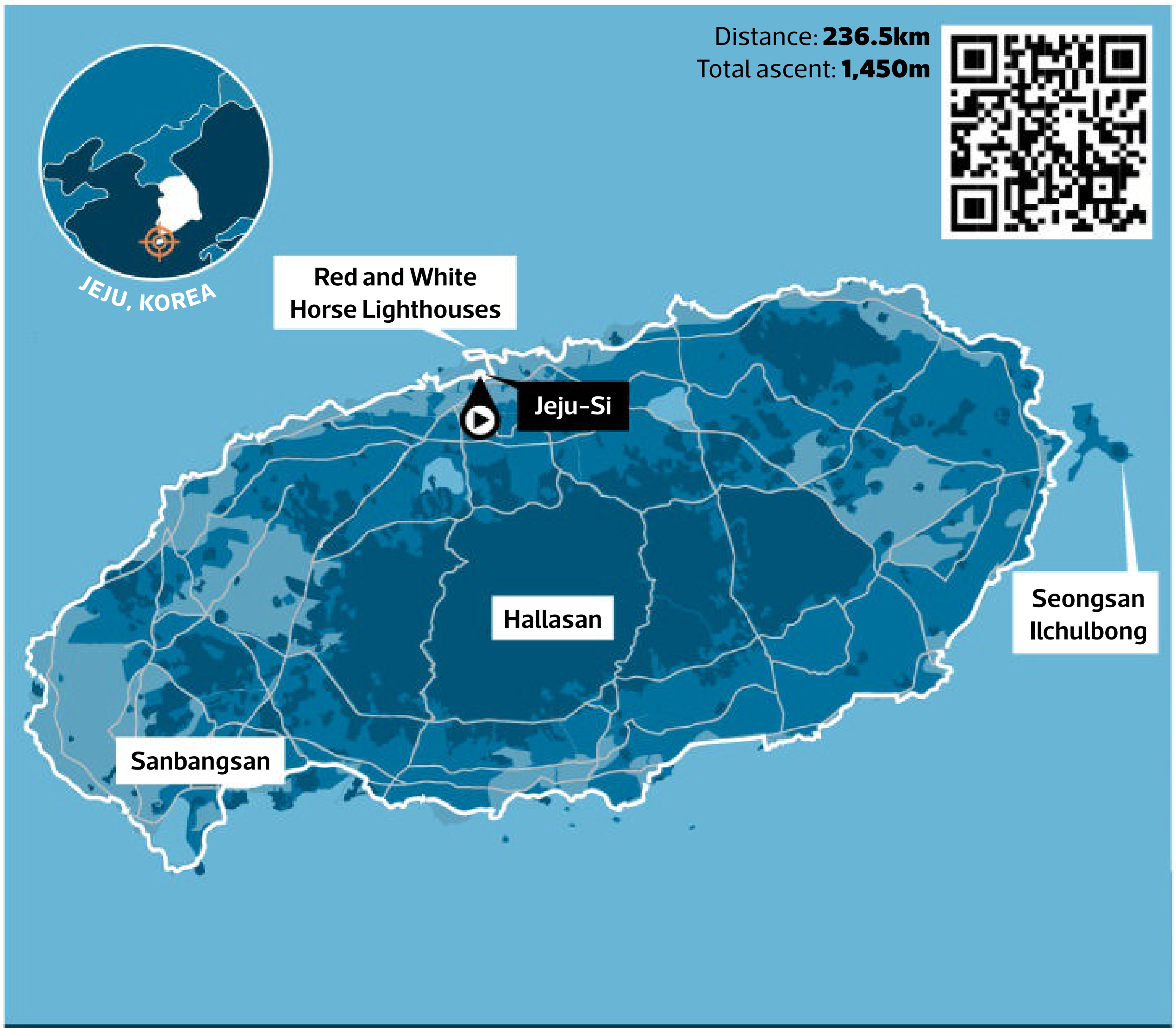
The Bike Certification System is far more fun than the name sounds. From the dry desk at the tourism office, we're handed novelty passports with miniature maps of the 12 major bike routes in Korea (called, by the way, the 'Happy Routes'). Every 20km or so of these routes stands – wait for it – a red phone box (yes, the kind you'd expect to see in London) where riders find an unvandalised custom stamp and ink pad to mark the corresponding space in their passport. Collecting stamps along an entire route earns



Above: The Saejae Pass is reached via bike path and an ultra-quiet mountain road that makes for an epic descent

Left: Small-scale farms of cabbages, bok choy and lettuce are lined with heritage-listed dry stone walls on Jeju island

Right: We didn't miss an opportunity to stop at a red phone box and stamp our passports

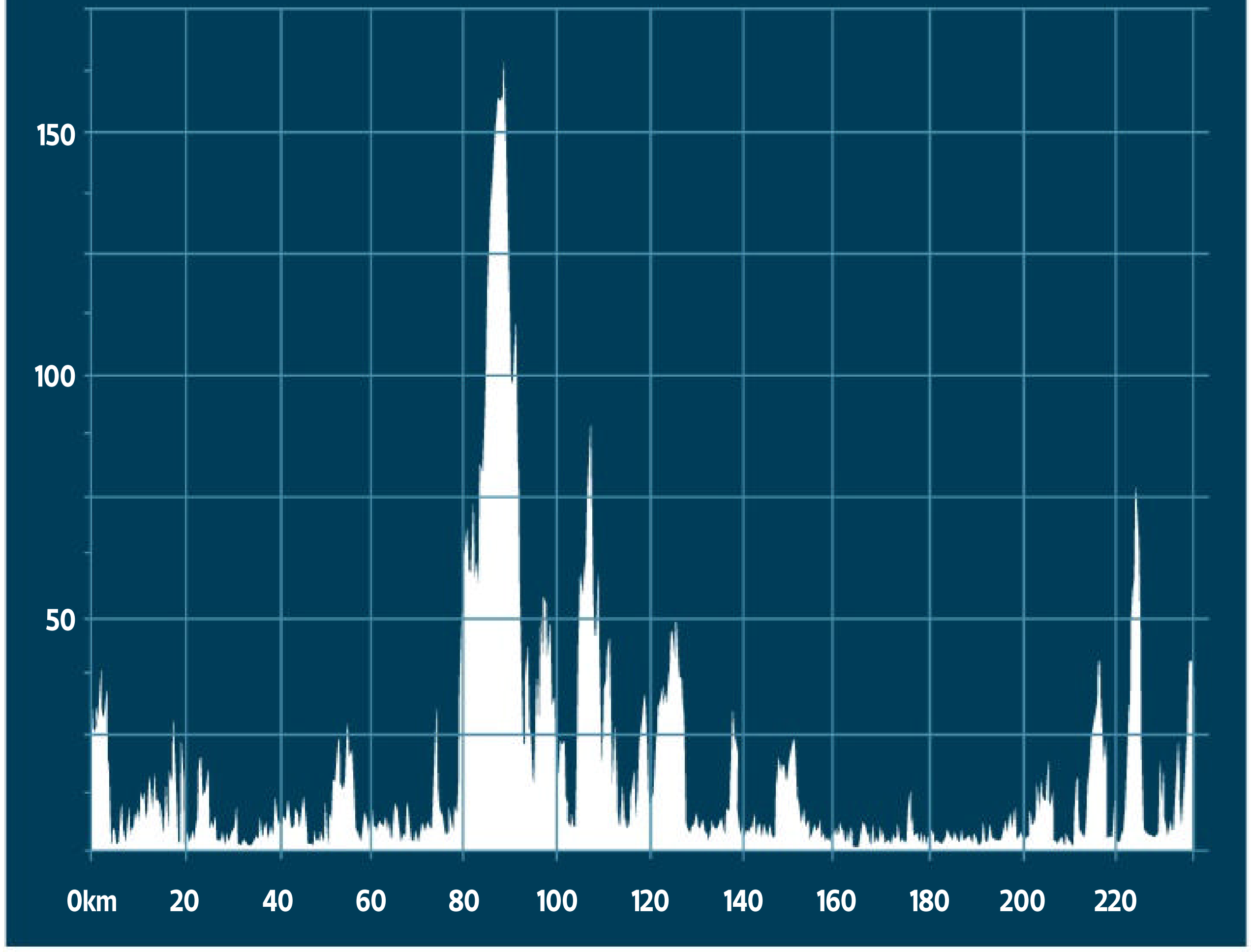


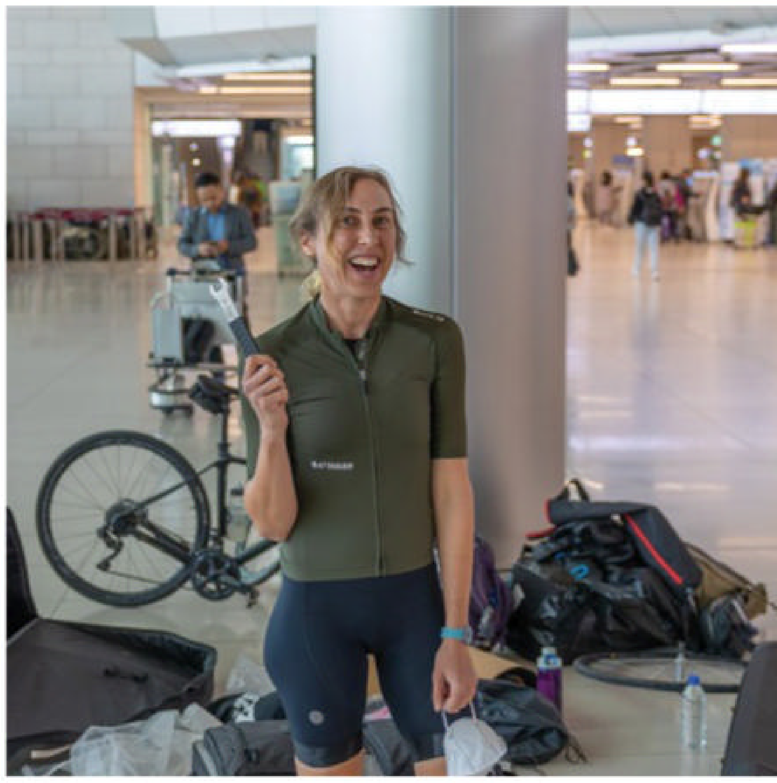
Distance: **236.5km**
Total ascent: **1,450m**

The route we took

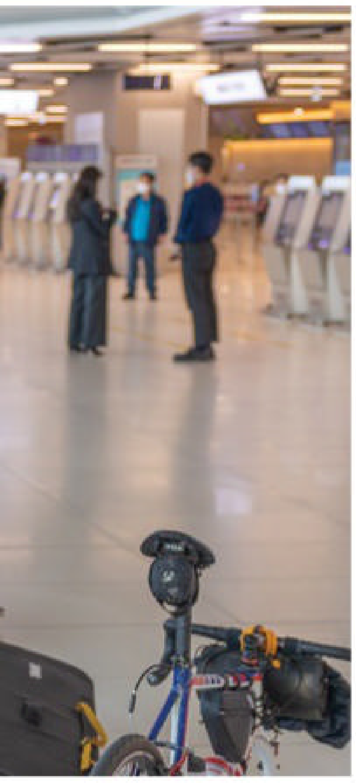
Follow in Cyclist's wheel tracks

Scan the QR code to discover this route on Strava. Starting at Jeju City, we rode anti-clockwise around the island, stopping at Sagye Beach, Pyoseon Beach, then returning to our start point in Jeju City. The route is precisely 234km and we divided this into three days of roughly 80km. Most of the riding is at around sea level, with plenty of pinch climbs and, of course, Jeju's famous wind to keep things tough. There are very few ways to get the route wrong, with a blue line painted along the way that alternates between quiet coast roads or bike path and stints along larger, busier roads (with options to ride on the slower bike path/shared path if you want a change of pace). Don't miss the red phone boxes every 20km or so to punch your hard-earned stamp and earn a big silver star for your passport.





The Bike Certification System is weird, it's fun and, as it turns out, it's intensely satisfying, gamifying the ride and breaking the day into interesting chunks



Top: The Bike Certification System features miniature maps of all of Korea's best bike paths, ready for stamping

Above: Squeezing every bit of riding into our trip meant packing our bikes, in full kit, amid the crowds of Gimpo airport

Above right: Jeju offers incredible riding on gorgeous coastal roads and paths

Thule RoundTrip

$1,499, thule.com/en-au

To transport his bike to and from Korea, Nick borrowed the Thule RoundTrip – surely the Cadillac of travel cases. It's tough, simple enough, and structured around a bottom-bracket mounted work stand, which attracted plenty of curious glances as *Cyclist* packed up its bikes in the departures hall at Gimpo airport. As well as securely protecting Nick's beaten-up Focus Mares, we liked how the case folded into itself, down to about a third of its size – convenient for when the bike isn't inside. It was a pleasure tow along, the Mares survived four flights without remark, and overall Nick was quite bummed to have to return it at the end of the trip.

rewards such as shiny stickers, certificates and even 'Olympic-style medals' for completing difficult routes – like the whopping 633km Four Rivers path between Seoul and Busan. It's weird, it's fun and, it turns out, it's intensely satisfying, gamifying the ride and breaking the day into interesting chunks that take you from scenic spot, to parkland, to viewpoint while the kilometres fly by. We very quickly become very serious about getting our stamps, and don't miss a single red phone box on our entire trip.

Red phone booths, known officially as 'Certification Centres' dot the landscape adjacent to the main, celebrated bike paths. With our official Korea cycling passports in our jersey pockets, we're ready to hit the routes. We spend a day or two exploring parts of the famous Four Rivers trail and the epic Saejae mountain pass. However, while Korea's major routes could take you through the entire country, including along the rugged east coast to the infamous DMZ – or Demilitarised Zone – this story is really about the holiday island of Jeju, where *Cyclist* spent three days on the bike circumnavigating our way to a shiny silver passport sticker.

Now known for its seafood, gentle climate and beaches, Jeju is every Korean's favourite place for holidays – and it's also perfect for cyclists

Jeju fantasy

Located about 80km off the south-eastern point of the mainland, Jeju is Korea's number one domestic tourist destination, and it's a bit like Tasmania meets the Gold Coast. It measures 260km in circumference in a roughly horizontal egg shape, and from the heart of this volcanic island rises Hallasan, a dormant volcano which, at 1,947 metres, is the highest mountain in Korea.

Jeju has known a lot in its long history. It has changed hands with the Japanese and been a penal island, and for centuries housed little more than poor fishing villages and subsistence farmers. Then the tourists started to come. Now, known for its seafood, gentle climate and beaches, it's every Korean's favourite place for holidays, corporate events and honeymooning, and is dotted all over with hotels, restaurants, photo spots and coffee shops. Perfect for cyclists.

The famous Jeju Fantasy Bike Trail traces the coast all the way around the island and measures about 240km. You can do it in a long, long day, or break it up like we did into two or three or even more days, making side trips towards the centre of the island and the majestic Hallasan or, if you take things slow, riding the ferry to explore smaller islands like U-Do (Cow Island), just off Jeju's own coast. Bikepacking is a great option, with roads criss-crossing the entire island, and plenty of places to eat and stay throughout, including excellent camping facilities. With an average of 80km a day we had time to stroll around coastal towns taking photos, stop for lunch, or drive to one of the local traditional gardens to catch the spring cherry blossoms.

Starting in Jeju-Si, or Jeju City, where Korea's second-busiest airport purrs along 24 hours a

Far left: Dropping into town at Sambangsan at the end of our first day circumnavigating the island

Left: Jeju's celebrated canola flowers in full bloom

Bottom left: Jeju is known for its seafood favourites like abalone porridge and conche sashimi

Below: The red half of the two pony lighthouses of Jeju, which are a nod to the ponies found on the island

We move freely ahead of the cars. We're helped by an epic tailwind, although as is often the nature of tailwinds, we don't notice until it's turned into a headwind. We just think we're fast

Above: Jeju's geological origins have left incredible volcanic landmarks off the coast

Left: You'll never get bored of eating out in Jeju, with incredible local delicacies at family-owned restaurants throughout the island

day with the endless passage of domestic visitors, we quickly find the coast and follow rainbow-painted bollards (witnessing the Korean love affair with the bollard alone is worth the trip), heading west over lumpy coastal cliff lines as the city gradually gives way behind us. We take in some of the most touristy coast of Jeju, with cafes and restaurants sporting English-language signs and plenty of photo stops overlooking the windswept Jeju Strait towards the mainland. We navigate through some twisty backways to a cement-clad jetty harangued by wind gusts to see two giant lighthouses shaped like ponies – the symbol, we're told, of Jeju island.

Koreans love the Jeju coastline and much of the island's attention is turned outwards to the sea, with every beach adorned with mosaics, sculptures, parklands and photo points, backed by strips of motels, seafood joints and ubiquitous cafes serving the iced coffee Koreans can't go a day without. Our first red-phone-box stamp spot is on a high cliff overlooking the black water of the Jeju Strait. From here, our route alternates between the low-key coastal strip and stints on Jeju's ring road, where we move freely ahead of the cars. We're helped by an epic tailwind, although as is often the nature of tailwinds, we don't notice it until it's turned into a headwind. We just think we're fast.

The highlight of the day is the arrival in Sagye Beach, where Sanbangsan mountain heaves itself beyond the sea in a perfect dome shape, jutting 200 metres above the coastal settlement below and dwarfing everything from horizon to horizon. This is a revered and much-loved landmark to Koreans, eclipsed only by their love for social media. As we approach the hotel we stumble across a traffic jam and track the kerfuffle to a small, trampled canola field in front of the Sanbangsan view, now populated with dozens of day-tripping Koreans who've paid for the privilege to take selfies with the mountain foregrounded by yellow flowers. With three stamps out of 10 already in our passports and the west coast of the island in our pockets, we join the crowds for selfies of the iconic view, oblivious to the gathering clouds and the hastening wind, both setting up for a big one tomorrow.

The three abundances

Day two, and the sun comes up brighter than it set, so the *Cyclist* team dress in all their summer finery, ready for the holiday weather for which Jeju, 'Korea's Hawaii', is known. Golden rays light up the canola fields so much that we almost understand what all the fuss is about. Light bounces off the ocean which (spoiler alert) shines turquoise for the first and only time during our visit. We congratulate one another for discovering such incredible weather in March. It's going to be a great day.

We cruise along a wide, flowing bike path overlooking the sea until the hard, unavoidable truth of our geographic location catches up with us. The sky darkens. The temperature drops a solid 10 degrees in as many minutes. After an emergency trip to the van to change into full winter kit, we carry on under heaving clouds, the glorious coastline transformed to a desolate, shipwrecking blade of black rock, jutting into an angry sea. Jeju is famous for its sunshine, but the weather is the weather and for now we're in for a slog.

They say Jeju is the island of three abundances: wind, rocks and women, and it's time for the wind to introduce itself. Sitting off on its own in the Korea Strait, Jeju is buffeted by strong gusts year-round, so riding around the island means you'll meet with this famous adversary and get to know both its kind side and its cruel side intimately. Jeju dialect has names for the east ▸

By the numbers

Because everybody loves stats

3,200

Number of Korean islands there are to explore

1,745

Kilometres of dedicated bike path in Korea

281

Officially recognised varieties of kimchi in Korea

165

Maximum elevation, in metres, reached on our circuit of Jeju island's coast

10

Phone booth stamps to gain on the Jeju Fantasy Bike Path

2.3

Magnitude earthquake we slept through one night

While that first day we'd soft pedalled at nearly 40kmh, the kilometres clicking over like the dials on a poker machine, today we battle and rage against an invisible wall of air

Right: In March the flowering trees are just coming into bloom, attracting huge crowds from the mainland

Top right: Seaweed left to dry on the coast made for an interesting obstacle course

The rider's gear

When travelling to explore new places I make sure my bike and gear is ready for anything and a combination of capable, reliable and lightweight (in that order).

I rode my Norco Threshold, a full carbon CX bike I've adapted for all-road riding. It's perfect for trips where I don't know what's around the next corner. It handled perfectly on bitumen, loose pavé shortcuts and broken bits of bike path. Norco has stopped making the Threshold in 2023, but the Norco Search is their dedicated gravel machine that continues its legacy.

I ran a Shimano Ultegra Di2 groupset with a compact 34–50-tooth crankset and 11–32 tooth cassette to give me a wide range of gears with the super light action of Shimano's electronic shifting. I opted for 40cm bars for extra leverage and stability and Easton EA 90 SL wheels, a great combination of light and strong. I ran my go-to training and adventure-ready 32mm Maxxis Re-Fuse tyres set up tubeless. They're totally bomb-proof on trips where I can't afford to stop to fix a flat and can't predict what the riding surface will be like.

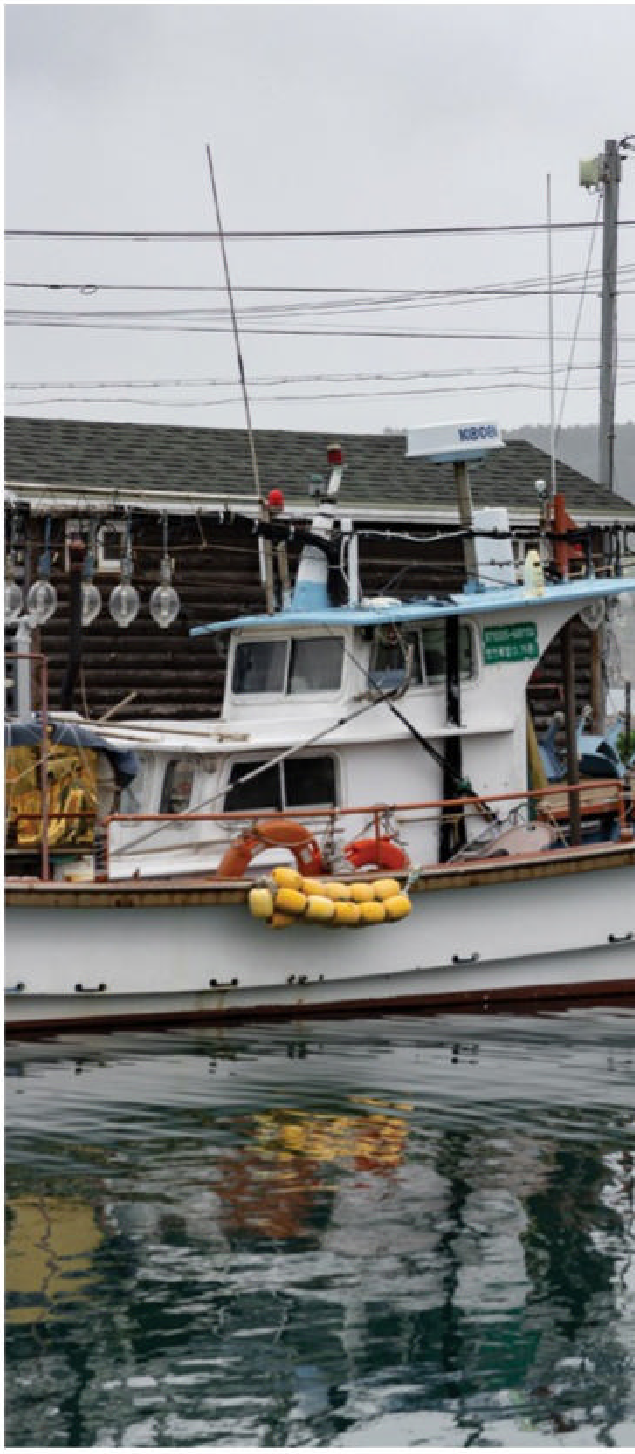
I ran a trusty Lazer Strada Kineticore helmet and my favourite Shimano RX6 gravel shoes, with urban camo silver details that always get noticed. Otherwise, I was kitted out in Attaquer kit: recycled, Australian-owned and incredibly high-performing, I always felt warm and fast, even in Korea's fickle March headwinds.

wind, the west wind, the south wind, the north wind, but also names for the north-east wind, the south-west wind and… you get the idea. By the end of our second day cycling Jeju, we have names for the wind too, but none of them are printable. While that first day we'd soft pedalled at nearly 40kmh, the kilometres clicking over like the dials on a poker machine, today we battle and rage against an invisible wall of air, barely topping 20km an hour.

Jeju's second abundance, rock, imbues the island's culture, geography and landscape. Over millennia, the poor subsistence farmers and fishers of Jeju have pulled millions of rocks out of soil that was impossible to till and piled them up to divide their fields, to divide their homes, and to build. Now, we cycle through a warren of stone walls that divide tiny fields of canola, pak choi, and of course, cabbage, and fence off every yard, road and building. There's an estimated 36,000km of stone wall on Jeju, enough to go around the entire planet on an island that's only 260km in circumference itself.

And you're wondering about the women. Mid-way through the second day, our guide stops us and indicates that we should get off our bikes at the entry to a nondescript concrete building right on the sea wall. A rash-shirt and some swimmers flap in the wind, tied to a string out the front of the shut wooden door. Buoys and nets are piled against a dry-stone shelter. Our guide types something into Google translate: *This is the home of the Haenyeo women*. The third abundance of Jeju.

All the chief deities traditionally overseeing Jeju Island are women, and Jeju has a strongly matriarchal culture, embodied particularly by the fabled Haenyeo. The Haenyeo women are free-diving fishers for shellfish and other seafood who spend every day diving in Jeju's wild, sometimes freezing waters, holding their breath for 90 seconds or more as they collect their valuable catch. With girls as young as their teens and women as mature as their 90s working the sea, the Haenyeo have their own social



> **The Haenyeo women are free-diving fishers for shellfish and other seafood who spend every day diving in Jeju's wild, sometimes freezing waters, holding their breath for 90 seconds or more**

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싱싱 참 맛집

CONGRATULATIONS

Above: We earned a silver sticker for completing the 240km Jeju Fantasy Bike Trail, collecting 10 stamps along the way

structure, customs and lores, and are revered across the island for bringing up delicacies such as abalone and conche, devoured sashimi-style year-round in Jeju's seafood restaurants by enraptured Korean mainlanders.

We're ready with our cameras and our phones. Our guide types another message: *They are out having lunch*. We wait another few minutes, then hop back on our bikes and carry on. Before long we're cheered up by another red phone-box, and battle through the final few kilometres before pulling into one of Korea's nicest hotels for the evening. We walk into town and take photos of sculptures of the Haenyeo on the seashore, happy, in a way, that for us they'll always remain somewhat mythical.

At the start of day three, we enjoy the gorgeous views out to Seongsan Ilchulbong, Jeju's famous sunrise mountain, where you can watch the glorious dawn light break over the sea. By the time we reach our first phone booth for the day, however, the rain has returned. Our guide, quite sensibly really, opts to throw his bike in the back of the van and trail us on four wheels. Follow the blue line and ride fast, he tells us.

We agree that's a sound strategy, and with every part of us soaked, we push on to our second stamp spot, where we huddle in one of Korea's excellent, ubiquitous convenience stores, entertained by a 'ramen machine' that produces hot, steaming noodles that, along with a couple of chocolate bars, just about warm us up for the final push.

Rounding the east coast of Jeju we admire the rugged and dramatic coastline, and we make our way to some of the least touristy areas, where small, family-run seafood restaurants with just two or three dishes on the menu serve local diners, and where the sea pounds into black stone shelters built centuries ago to protect the Haenyeo women divers between trips to the ocean floor.

It's quiet on the roads and as we edge towards the west the tailwind returns, ushering us back to Jeju-Si at a scary-fast clip until the last kilometres take us through fish markets, ports, jetties and a giant cruise ship terminal. A final climb through the city gardens lands us at the tourism office, perched on a high point overlooking the sea. Here, forms are filled out, our passports are processed and approved, and we're rewarded with our silver Jeju Fantasy Bike Trail star sticker. We put the bikes in the van, proud of our achievement, and head out for beer, bibimbap, and kimchi.

Imogen Smith is a cycling writer who'd have gladly stayed longer to collect many, many more stickers

How we did it

TRAVEL & ACCOMMODATION

We flew direct via Air Asiana to Seoul. If you're flying with a bike, check with the carrier for excess and oversize baggage charges before booking to make sure you get the best total price. It seems airlines are preparing for an explosion of interest from Aussies and Kiwis: Qantas have established direct flights from major cities, as well as Jetstar, and Korea's airlines Korean Air and Asiana Airlines all operate regular, inexpensive direct services.

From Seoul's Incheon International airport, we took a domestic flight from Gimpo, Seoul's domestic airport to Jeju. Gimpo to Jeju is the busiest air route in Korea and there are affordable flights leaving every 15–30 minutes, with just a small charge for taking a bike along with you (again, check before booking just in case).

From there we transferred to a nearby hotel and started our ride from the door the next morning, stopping at hotels along the route. As a tourism hotspot, there are hundreds of hotels on Jeju and you're never far away from a bibimbap and a comfortable bed on the island. Bikepacking is also a great option, with some great facilities to be found across the country.

FOOD & DRINK

Korean food is varied, fresh, tasty, and sometimes adventurous. Excellent snacks can be found in ubiquitous convenience stores. If you're vegetarian or vegan, don't believe the doubters. If you're happy to work with the accompaniments, even meals surrounded by meat-eaters leave plenty to enjoy.

Koreans love coffee and drink it in traditional and creative forms. There are often coffee houses on the side of bike paths and in most towns and suburbs.

Functional English is widely spoken in Korea's tourism areas and hotels, and most restaurant staff have at least a smattering, which is often all you need. Learn a couple of key phrases like hello (*annyeonghaseyo!*) and thank you (*gamsahabnida*) – these get you a long way. For everything else, have Google Translate handy.

THANKS

We'd like to thank Korea Tourism Organisation for hosting us, and our wonderful guide and translator Seongoo, who helped us get the shots and story for this piece (english.visitkorea.or.kr). Thanks also to Sydney clothing brand Attaquer for kitting Imogen out in their comfortable 100% recycled All-Day range.

NETWORK NEWS

MELBOURNE REBOOTS PAUSED BIKE INFRASTRUCTURE

The City of Melbourne has big plans for bikes involving 44km of new protected lanes across the municipality. The program has taken another step forward with new infrastructure proposed for North Melbourne and Kensington.

Nearly 3km of new separated lanes are planned for these inner suburbs, which will add to the 19km already built under the program and improve riding conditions along important west-east routes into the CBD.

INNOVATIVE NEW BRIDGE FOR BIKE RIDERS IN SYDNEY

Riders in Sydney's west will enjoy free and easy access when the Alfred Street Bridge—the first diagonal arch bridge to be designed and constructed in Australia—opens in coming months.

The bridge will serve as not just an eye-catching architectural landmark, but an important new link for Parramatta's expanding population and connect to a key cycleway along the Parramatta River.

LONG-AWAITED RAIL TRAIL SWINGS INTO ACTION

The first section of the much-anticipated Northern Rivers Rail Trail is finally up and running. Bike riders, walkers and joggers are enjoying the picturesque 24km stretch of recreational trail between Murwillumbah Railway Station and Crabbes Creek in north-east NSW, and some exciting extensions are on the way.

Further sections will form a continuous 132km rail trail, allowing riders to revel in natural beauty, art and culture along a winding journey through Mullumbimby, onto Byron Bay and inland to Casino.

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Matej Mohorič
The Slovenian on his pursuit of excellence – as well as *that* descent
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Cyclist
Dawn to dusk
Available on the App Store

Bikes

This month's best new bikes and kit get put through their paces

① Cervélo S5 p134
Rather than look for more speed, Cervélo set out to make its latest S5 more refined. They've done just that – *and* found more speed as a result.

② Scott Foil p138
One of the very first aero bikes gets a major overhaul and now looks dramatically different. So does it still blend speed with comfort?

③ Sram Force AXS p142
Sram's original groupset for the road gets an update for 2023 that can best be described as subtle, but it's also highly effective.

3
SRAM
SRAM FORCE

Photos Mike Massaro, Lizzie Crabb, Joseph Branston

Words **JAMES SPENDER**

Cervélo
S5

Witness the quickness of Cervélo's refined aero racer

'The mantra with designing the new bike was "simplify and enhance",' says Cervélo's director of product management, Maria Benson. 'So there are no revolutionary steps here; more this is a refined design.'

By way of evidence for the performance of the new, enhanced S5, Cervélo reminds us that Wout van Aert used it last year to rack up the highest ever sprint points in a modern-era Tour de France, some 480*. Van Aert is quite good, of course, but I have every reason to believe the S5 helped, because this thing is *quick*.

New for old

Refinement really is the word here, because to the casual onlooker the S5 looks very much like the bike it replaces, which debuted in 2018.

I tested that old S5 back in issue 39 and I remember it being tremendously fast, but it wasn't the smoothest, nor the best-handling, nor the easiest to work on or travel with. The S5 debuted Cervélo's V Stem, a two-piece bar with a two-pronged stem through which cables were routed. An array of bolts and toppers and spacers held this front end together, and let's just say you were glad you weren't the team mechanic. Still, Cervélo pronounced the S5 *fast*, hence why it has stuck with the overall frame shape, albeit with some deeper tubes here and there after the UCI relaxed its rules on tube dimensions. Cervélo has also kept the V Stem, but there are some useful tweaks.

Crucially, the fork is now one-piece carbon, whereas before the section under the stem was a separate alloy topper. Without diagrams it's a devil to explain how the new fork, stem and headset all goes together, but trust me, it *is* simpler and it's also more adjustable – the bars attach to each stem prong with one bolt, not two, so they can be more accurately tilted. And trust Cervélo, the new fork design lightens the load by 53g compared to the old S5.

That's not huge and it certainly isn't enough to get the S5 anywhere close to that hallowed 6.8kg, but I can't begrudge it the grams because it's these grams that buy it the speed.

Clearance and tyres

The whole aero vs weight debate will rumble on forever, but most of the experts I've ever spoken to agree that aero trumps weight in most real-world circumstances save for hill climbing time-trials. As such, an 8kg bike is perfectly ▶

The spec

Model Cervélo S5

Price $12,500 (as tested)

Weight 8.3kg (56cm)

Groupset Sram Force AXS

Wheels Reserve 52/63 rims on Zipp ZR1 hubs

Finishing kit Cervélo HB14 Carbon bars and ST35 Carbon stem, Cervélo SP20 Carbon seatpost, Selle Italia Novus Boost Evo SuperFlow Ti saddle, Vittoria Corsa TLR 28mm tyres

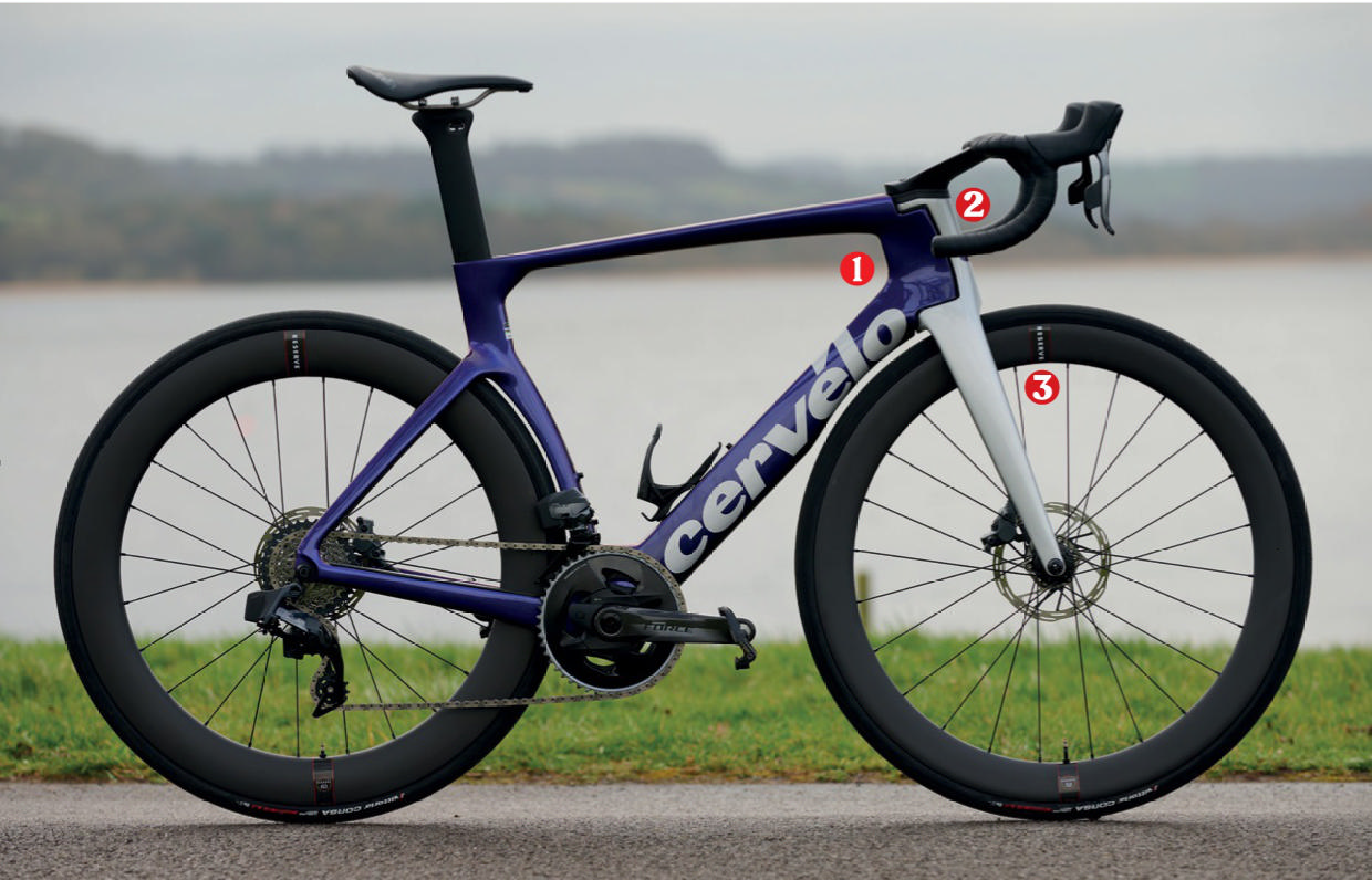
Contact cervelo.com

Highlights

① The frame shape is similar to the outgoing generation but the tubes are subtly bigger, specifically the head tube and BB

② The iconic V Stem remains from the previous S5, while the fork loses its alloy topper and assembly is simplified

③ Reserve's wheels vary in height and width – taller and narrower at the rear and shallower and wider up front to aid stability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cervélo
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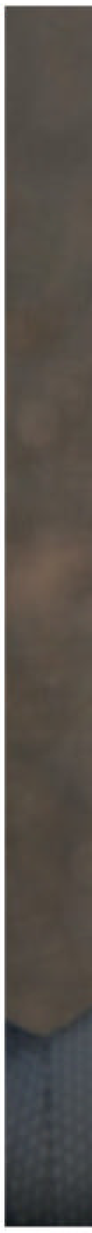
fine for most things if it's slippery enough, and the S5 clearly is that.

From a standing start I don't think I've ever ridden a faster bike than the gull-winged Specialized Venge ViAS (quickly discontinued for its limitations in other areas), but off the mark the S5 reminds me of that bike. It's really hard to quantify, and I'm just describing a 'feeling', but every which way I rode – climbs, long flats, sprints – that same feeling cropped up. The new S5 just feels easier to pedal.

Cervélo puts the figure of 8.3W at 48kmh as the difference between the last-generation S5 and this one, and places much of that saving on a deeper head tube and bottom bracket plus revised wheels from sister brand Reserve.

The Reserves follow the Enve model of differing rim depths, but also add differing widths to the equation too, so the rear is 62mm deep and 24mm wide internally, while the front is 53mm deep and 25mm wide. This is said to aid stability at the front end because a blunter,

It's really hard to quantify, but every which way I rode the same feeling cropped up. The S5 just feels easier to pedal



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RESERVE
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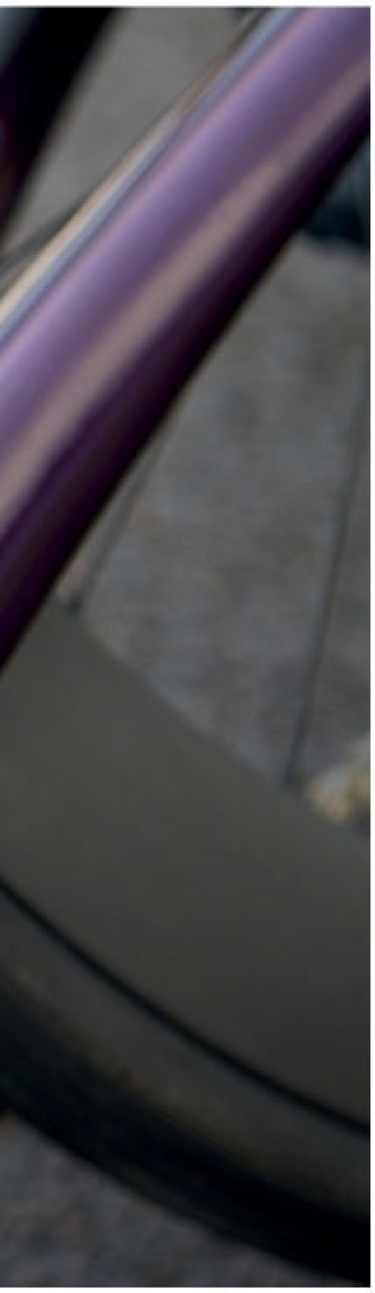


Left: Tyre clearance is up from 30mm to 34mm, and being able to run lower pressures makes an incredibly fast bike smoother, more sure-footed and more comfortable

shallower wheel behaves better in crosswinds. I dare say it works, but I reckon the S5 would be as quick with any set of decent deep sections.

S5 or S5

With such subtle tweaks it's hard to separate this new S5 from the old one, but there is one crucial reason beyond that cleared-up front end and a few saved grams to choose the new bike: tyre clearance. The old bike had room for 30mm tyres whereas the new S5 can cope with up to 34mm. Now 34mm is probably overkill, but it does mean there is comfortable clearance for wide wheel/tyre combos, and it allows the Vittorias specced here to fit. They're technically 28mm but they measure over 30mm on the Reserve wheels.

All this extra volume means more surface area and lower pressures, which brings more cornering grip, greater comfort and increased smoothness, and smoothness equals speed (I refer you to the brilliant article on page 92, 'Is wider faster?', not sure who wrote it). And what all *that* does is help make amends in areas where bikes this aero – such as that Venge ViAS and to a lesser degree the old S5 – are so often lacking: handling and comfort. Bundle that with a front end that's slightly easier to live with and a little more aero styling, and Cervélo has managed to raise the game of an already brilliant bike.

** Pub fact: the all-time highest sprint classification score was André Darrigade with 613 points in the 1959 Tour. Beat that, Wout.*

Alternatively...

Middle ground

The Soloist (from $3,700 for the frameset) borrows a pinch of S5 and mixes it with a dollop of R5 (Cervélo's climber's bike) to create an aero-esque all-rounder at a significantly cheaper price.

Top dog

If you're keen to shave the weight and can bear the cost, the S5's Sram Red AXS build sees a 56cm come in at just under 8kg. It will set you back $17,500 for the privilege though.

Words **SAM CHALLIS**

Scott

Foil

A brute of a bike that just about manages to pull its punches

The Scott Foil has a good claim to be the forebear of the well-rounded aero bikes we see on the market today. Well, the second generation does – riding the first was like operating a jackhammer – but Scott's engineers introduced enough forgiveness in its successor that in 2016 Mat Hayman was able to win Paris-Roubaix on one. The Foil's reputation of being able to blend speed with comfort was cemented, and many competitors were playing catch-up for the next few years.

Since then the Foil has had tweaks, such as the inclusion of disc brakes and the integration of cables, but this latest update to the Foil RC is the first true overhaul the bike has had since that cobble-crushing design of 2016.

Burly do-over

The previous Foil was an elegant affair, its sculpted tube profiles attempting to balance aerodynamics with stiffness, light weight and comfort in equal parts. Now Scott has changed tack. Developed with input from aerodynamicist Simon Smart, the new bike's tubes are narrower, deeper and more aggressively angled. With its extended head tube and down tube, dramatically dropped seatstays and seat tube that follows the curve of the rear wheel, it looks more like Scott's Plasma TT bike than its Addict RC road bike, and it's the same in performance terms. The new Foil is reportedly 16 watts more efficient at 40kmh.

As bikes are now thought of more as complete systems than different parts being optimised in isolation, both the Foil's new Creston iC SL Aero integrated cockpit and Syncros Duncan SL Aero CFT seatpost play crucial roles in the performance of the bike. Scott says six watts of the new Foil's advantage comes from the new cockpit, which guides cables neatly down into an impressively narrow head tube, where a thin one-inch steerer creates space for cables without widening the area. Scott then offers the Creston cockpit in 19 size combinations and even makes a non-integrated stem if a particular bar design is desired over everything else offered.

The seatpost is equally noteworthy. It's made up of a thin forward-facing structural shaft, backed by a lower tessellating support block to provide air-smoothing depth without excess rigidity. The component forms the basis of the brand's claim that the new bike is 10% comfier than the last Foil. The upper rear block is removable and in a triumph for utility, the space its removal creates can house a proprietary rear ▶

The spec

Model Scott Foil RC Pro
Price $15,600
Weight 7.4kg (56cm)
Groupset Shimano Dura-Ace Di2
Wheels Shimano Dura-Ace C50
Finishing kit Syncros Creston iC SL Aero cockpit, Syncros Duncan SL Aero CFT seatpost, Syncros Belcarra V-Concept 1.0 saddle, Vittoria Corsa Control TLR 25mm tyres
Contact scott-sports.com

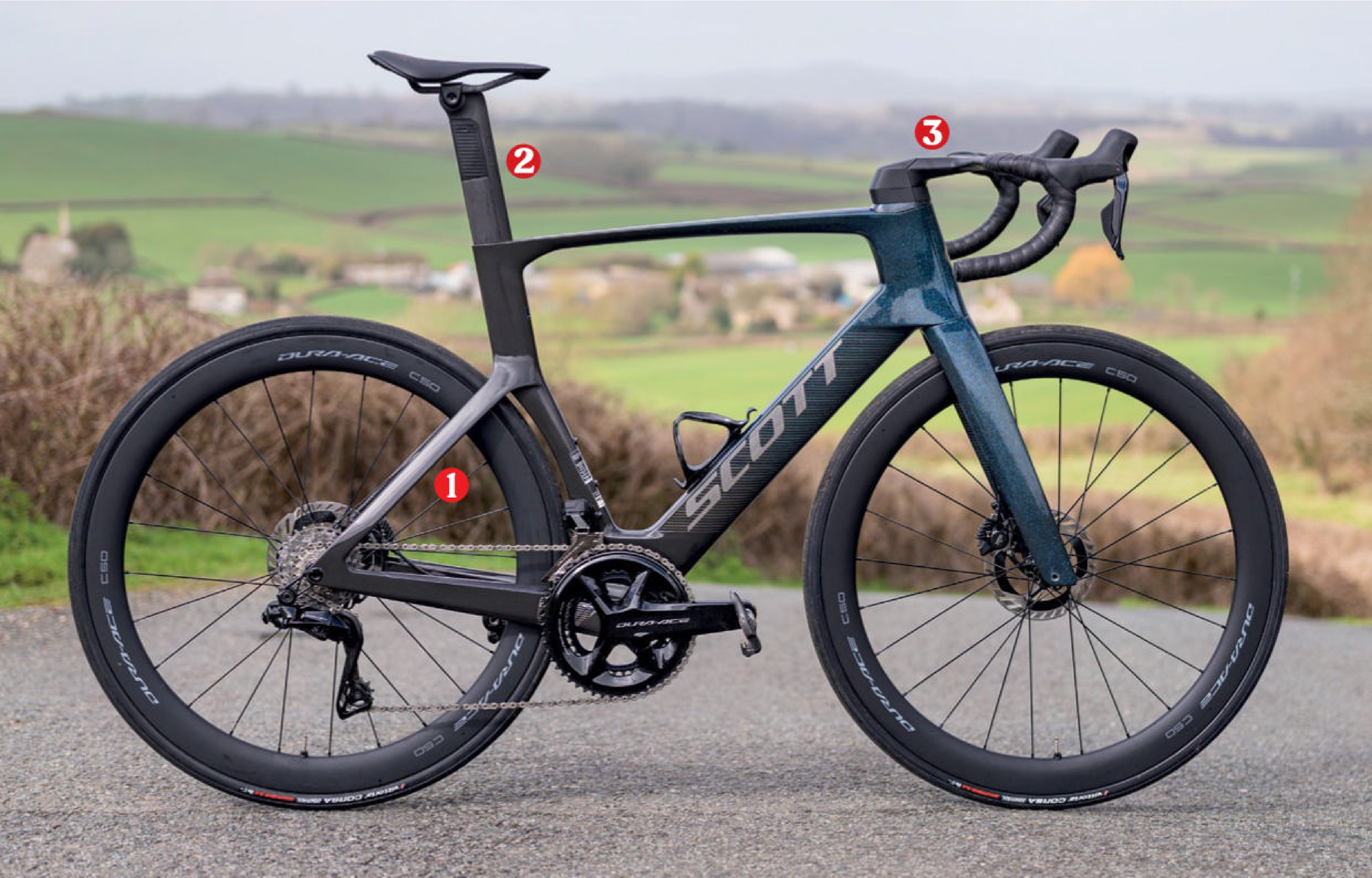
Highlights

❶ The compact, stocky rear triangle contributes to a feeling of efficient power transfer

❷ The structural part of the Foil's seatpost is the thin front section. The blocks at the back are for support only, and the top one can be swapped out for a rear light

❸ The Syncros Creston iC SL Aero cockpit is comfortable when riding normally, but stiff under torsional sprinting forces

CRESTON IC SL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SCOTT
DURA-ACE C50
DURA-ACE C50
DURA-ACE C50
DURA-ACE C50

light. It isn't included with the bike as standard, which is a shame, but it's nice to have the option.

Flexible finishing kit

Both cockpit and seatpost are influential in performance terms. Scott engineer Paul Remy says that while developing the bar/stem, which is based on a design used to equally good effect on the Addict RC, he noticed that the composite layup pattern allowed flex under light load but still provided stiffness at higher loads. That feature is evident while riding, as the cockpit filters out a good chunk of the vibration coming up through the bulky front end but doesn't feel sloppy or vague when wrenched about in a sprint.

The seatpost also adds more than its fair share of compliance, even if the design is a little more compromised. The interface between its front and rear portions needs to be lubricated with grease for them to slide against each other without creaking. Scott recommends it is serviced every 1,000km, but I experienced a good bit of noise, which was frustrating. The grease tended to migrate out from between the parts too, which made the otherwise beautiful bike a bit messy in that area. It's a good design in theory, but in reality it's too complicated. With the Foil's 30mm tyre clearance, a move to a bigger rear tyre could have a similar effect on compliance without the extra hassle or the expense of the alternative one-piece seatpost.

While these auxiliary parts are certainly worthy of discussion, the frameset still holds its own. At 7.4kg, the extra couple of hundred grams the Foil RC Pro carries over the lightest in the category saps a little zing out of its acceleration from a standing start, but its aero design and the stiffness created by those chunky tubes and compact rear triangle give the bike an extra gear when most of its rivals would be out of revs. It feels notably receptive to a further kick of effort at high speeds, so the new Foil undoubtedly remains a bike for the sprinters.

That said, the smart extra design features showcase why more Team DSM riders than ever have chosen this bike for Paris-Roubaix this year. The Foil is still a benchmark in its field. ◐

The latest Foil has narrower, deeper and more aggressively angled tubes. The extended head and down tubes, dropped seatstays and curved seat tube make it visually akin to Scott's TT bike

> Its aero design and the stiffness created by those chunky tubes give the bike an extra gear when most rivals would be out of revs

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DURA-ACE

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worldbicyclerelief.org

Words **SAM CHALLIS**

Sram
Force AXS

The new Force groupset gets some refined componentry and a sparkly facelift

Originally released in 2006, Force was Sram's first road groupset. While Red AXS now sits at the top of the brand's performance tree, Force retains a critical position in Sram's range, as it aims to offer much of the same technology as its bigger sibling but at a more accessible price.

Force's last major update in 2019 aligned it in a technological sense with the then-newly minted Red AXS's wireless 12-speed drivetrain, adopting the eTap shift logic of tapping the right shift paddle for a harder gear, left for easier and both together to switch chainrings. However, in detail and appearance there was a distinct disparity between the tiers. Force AXS drew criticism for its comparatively cheap appearance next to the machined aluminium and shiny silver decals of Red. The updated Force AXS seeks to address that issue.

'We recognised the need to elevate Force to be more premium in finish, so we worked with our Taiwan development partner to upgrade the machining and finishing parts of Force's manufacturing process,' says Dan Stefiuk, Sram's road product manager.

The result is Force's new paintjob, a sparkly dark silver that Sram dubs 'Unicorn Grey', paired with 'Laser Foil' brushed aluminium accents to pick out the branding detail on each component.

Decadent naming conventions aside, the groupset's new finish is a clear step up. Just as with Shimano Ultegra Di2, Sram pitches Force AXS as the premium option for the regular rider, and the groupset's less workmanlike appearance better reflects that now.

The grey finish and silver accents are somewhat understated indoors and in low light, but they come alive in sunlight, revealing a sparkly depth to the grey and a rainbow of colour in the areas of brushed metal.

More than skin deep

While the derailleurs, brakes and crank arms are fundamentally the same as the last-generation Force, the update is more than superficial in a few key areas, if not totally new in the context of Sram's wider drop-bar groupset range. The new groupset borrows a smaller, sleeker lever design from Rival AXS and a one-piece chainring construction from Red AXS.

'At this stage we decided to not make it an entire platform change, hence the degree of carry-over,' says Anthony Medaglia, Sram's ▸

The spec

Model Sram Force AXS 2x
Price $3,400 – $4,396 (depending on component selection)
Weight 2,896g (claimed)
Chainset Force AXS 2x (with Quarq power meter), 48/35t
Shifters Force AXS
Derailleurs Force AXS
Brakes Force AXS
Rotors Paceline, 160mm
Chain Force Flattop
Cassette Force XG-1270, 10-33t
Contact sram.com

Highlights

① The rear derailleur has been only superficially updated, but that's no bad thing. It executes shifts quickly and accurately

② The new groupset borrows the one-piece chainring from top-tier Red AXS to improve front shift quality

③ Force AXS's new look is understated, but sunlight reveals sparkly depth in the finish

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chief engineer for road and gravel drivetrains. ‘However, we felt like we were sitting on developments we could implement quickly, with minimum resources, but that could be quite impactful to performance. By adopting from Rival and Red, we could optimise Force in a very efficient manner.’

The move to Rival’s lever shape is the most important change in an ergonomic sense for Force AXS. The brake pad contact adjustment, previously located on top of the master cylinder in the lever body, has been removed, and thanks to last year’s introduction of wireless Blips (satellite shift buttons), wired Blip connection ports could be dropped too. These changes allowed the Force levers to become much more compact, despite actually offering more room for finger-wrap underneath the lever body. The shift paddle has been slimmed down and elongated too.

In use, while the lever body is still blockier in form than the more organic shape of the controls from Shimano and Campagnolo, it proved to be comfortable to hold. The increase in space underneath the hood was particularly noticeable, with plenty of room for three fingers to wrap around the hood body, which itself is solid and smooth with no indents (such as access ports to the lever internals) interrupting its shape.

Sharp shifting

With looks being such a focus in Force’s update and the crankset being the focal point of any groupset, Sram says it spotted an opportunity for a distinct visual change in this area, while also altering its performance by incorporating a direct-mount chainring design similar to Red AXS. As opposed to being separately bolted on to a spider, the chainrings are machined from a single piece of aluminium. Sram says this makes the chainrings stiffer and lighter (a claimed 85g saving) and also improves shift quality.

I’d say the switch to the new rings has perhaps sped the shifting up, though it still can’t match the sheer immediacy of the front shifting on Shimano’s latest-generation groupsets. The Force AXS front shifting feels like it persuades the chain to shift from one

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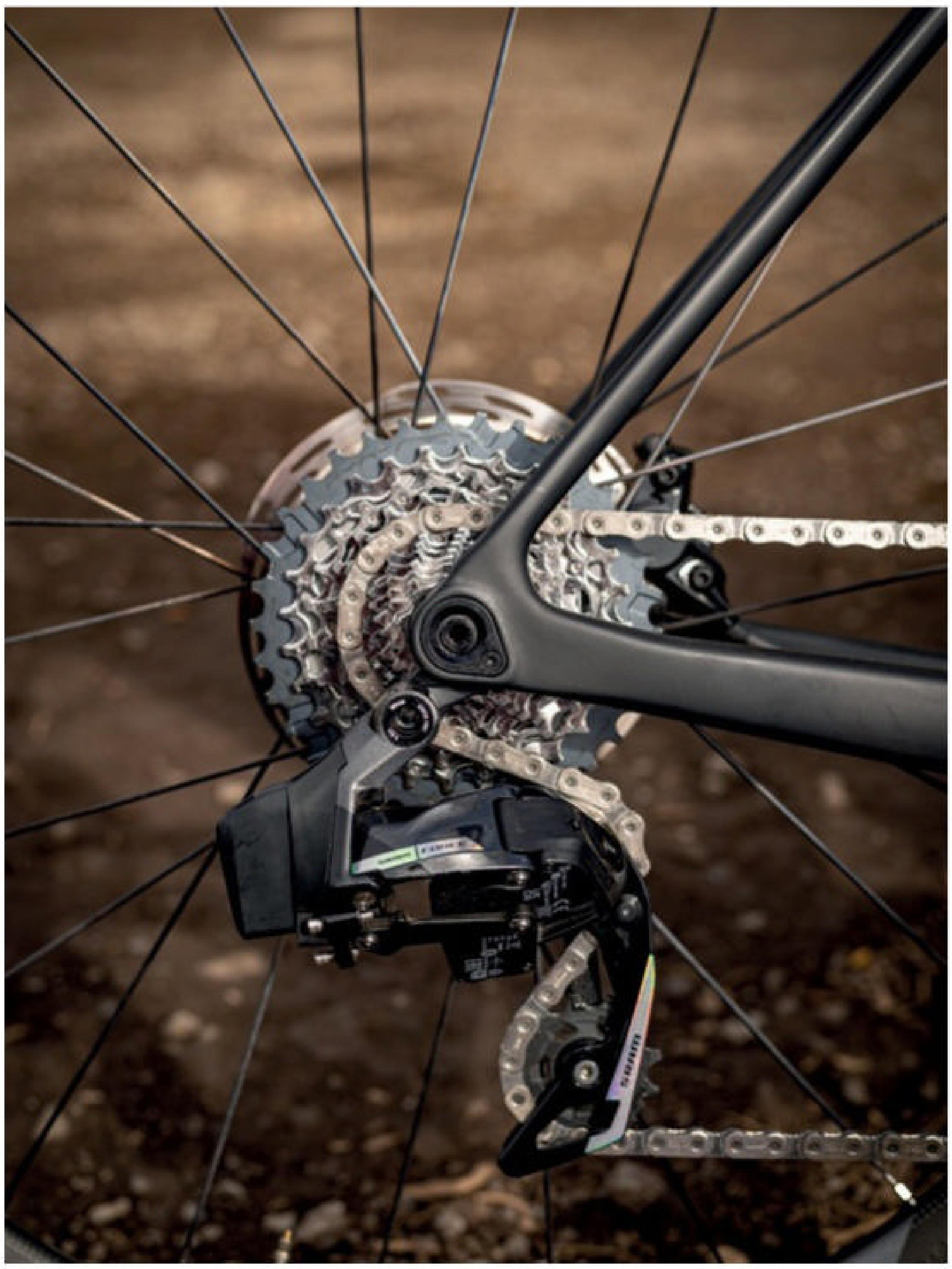
chainring to the other, where Shimano's Di2 front derailleur forcefully pushes the chain on and off. The Sram version is no less effective, it just feels a touch less instant.

The design change to one-piece chainrings does introduce the same Achilles heel as Red AXS's chainrings possess. Should the user choose the power meter-equipped option, the Quarq meter Sram offers is integrated into the chainring structure (this is the lightest and most accurate way to do it, apparently) so when the time comes to replace the rings, the meter goes in the bin too.

Sram does offer a trade-in discount of 10% when replacing worn-out rings, but once the claimed performance advantages of the system are exhausted I don't think there is enough incentive to outweigh the inherent disadvantages it brings. That said, the non-power meter-equipped guises of Force AXS sit at competitive price points, so should power measurement be desired, third-party options may be an affordable consideration.

While the overall upgrade is hardly earth-shattering, Sram has added some valuable changes to Force AXS that will be enough to keep it as a competitive and desirable alternative to the mid to high-end juggernaut that is Shimano's Ultegra Di2.



The cassette now has a nickel-chrome finish for better durability and a damper in the carrier of the bigger sprockets to reduce running noise

Alternatively...

Main rival

Shimano's Ultegra Di2 is Force AXS's main rival. In function, price and weight it's swings and roundabouts between the two, so you can choose on personal preference rather than any overt performance differences.

Rival relation

Rival AXS provides the same ergonomics as Force but more conventional chainrings that can be swapped independent of one another and/or a power meter. It's cheaper, but also 300g or so heavier.

M
NAPOLI
NAPOLI
RACE TIME

A Grand Tour moment

Tackling a stage of a Grand Tour requires planning, timing and knowledge of the terrain – and that's just the spectators

We're battling the Saturday morning city centre crowds through narrow streets, and my wife wants to know why we're heading uphill if we're looking for an underground station.

'Because it's called Monte Santo,' I reply. 'I think that means "sacred mountain".'

I check my map of the Metro and add half-heartedly, 'Maybe the first part of the journey is overground.'

We pass a square festooned with decorations and football scarves. A mural of Diego Maradona looks down from the side of an apartment block. I intend to lay a scarf of my own here tomorrow but for now we have a train to catch.

We finally spot a bright red 'M' but it's a sign for a station that hasn't actually been built yet.

'This place is crazy,' I mutter as a scooter bumps up onto the pavement in front of us. The rider deposits a loaf of bread into a waiting bucket which is immediately hoisted into the cobweb of balconies above.

When we finally find the station, a few of the other passengers are carrying the same official, €10 pink goody bag as me but mostly it's handbags, rucksacks and an occasional beach towel. The train leaves and immediately burrows into the 'sacred mountain'.

We are still underground when we stop at a station where the walls are adorned with famous Napoli footballers from down the years, including Maradona. Tomorrow this place will be crammed with fans heading to their team's last home game of the season.

We are close enough to see the sweat of Thomas de Gendt, Mathieu van der Poel and others who have established a breakaway ahead of the final push

'Are many cyclists commemorated with murals?' my wife wants to know. I can't think of any.

'No, but there's quite a few monuments and memorials all over the Alps and Pyrenees,' I say. 'Usually at the scene of crashes.'

The people opposite us are eating the distinctive, sweet pastry I recognise from breakfast: *sfogliatella*. Of all the pastries in all the cities in all the world, I have succumbed to the one that's hardest to pronounce. And now I'm starving.

Once out of the tunnel we catch glimpses of the sea between apartment blocks. There are occasional pink balloons and official banners tied to fencing and street furniture. After an hour we pull into the final station where the sign announces 'Torregaveta'.

A glance at my watch and quick mental calculation tells me the race is due here at any moment, but where exactly? We exit the platform. To our right we see a sandy beach (where we will later enjoy a beer and a swim before catching the train back to the city). Straight ahead and up a slight incline is the main road that curves around a rocky promontory. We see people strung out along the road and I spot a gap among those sitting on a low wall.

Our path is momentarily blocked by an old man wearing an official baseball cap. He wants us to wait until the first police outriders have passed. Then, with a flurry of hand gestures, we're allowed to slot in among the spectators.

'Are we in time?' asks my wife.

Before I can answer, more motorbikes carrying photographers and TV cameras fly past. There is a brief lull before a faint rumble from around the bend turns into a whoosh of air and a blur of colour, flesh and shiny bits.

Less than 90 minutes after seeing them start Stage 8 of the 2022 Giro d'Italia in the Piazza Plebiscito in Naples, we have made it in time to see the riders complete the first of three circuits of the peninsula of Monte di Procida.

By the time of the final circuit, we have moved to the top of the hill and are able to witness the riders coming up the other side, close enough to see the sweat of Thomas de Gendt, Mathieu van der Poel and others who have established a breakaway ahead of the final push and the run back to Naples. Their suffering seems at odds with the beautiful crescent of sand dappled with reclining bodies below.

Before starting the walk back to the beach, I hand over the baseball cap from my goody bag to a young boy who has been watching the race wide-eyed with his parents. We bump fists and say '*ciao*'. Maybe I'll see him again next year.

Illustration **Sean O'Brien**

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